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THE WILD HUNTRESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE SQUATTER'S CLEARING.

The white-headed eagle, soaring over the spray of a Tennessean forest, looks down upon the clearing of the squatter. To the eye of the bird, it is alone visible; and though but a spot in the midst of that immense green sea, it is conspicuous by the colour of the trees that stand over it. They stand, but grow not: the girdling ring around their stems has deprived them of their sap—the ivory bill of the *log-cock* has stripped them of their bark—their leaves and twigs have long since disappeared; and only the trunks and greater branches remain, like blanched skeletons, with arms upstretched to heaven, as if mutely appealing for vengeance against their destroyer.

The squatter's clearing, therefore, still thus encumbered, is a mere vistal opening in the woods, where the underwood alone has been removed. The more slender saplings have been cut down or rooted up—the tangle of parasitical plants has been torn from the trees—the cane-brake has been set on fire—and the brush, collected in heaps, has melted away upon the blazing pile. Only a few stumps of inferior thickness remain, as evidence that a little labour has been performed by the axe.

Even as it is, the clearing is a mere patch—scarcely two acres

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in extent—and the rude rail fence, that zigzags around it, attests that the owner is satisfied with the dimensions of his agricultural domain. There are no recent marks of the axe—not even the 'girdling' of a tree—nothing to show that another rood is required. The squatter is essentially a hunter, and hates the sight of an extensive clearing, as he would the labour of making one.

The virgin forest is his domain, and he is not the man to rob it of its primeval charms. The sound of the lumberer's axe, cheerful to the lonely traveller, has no music for the ear of the squatter; it is to him a note of evil augury—a knell of dread import. It is not often that he hears it: he dwells beyond the circle of its echoes. His nearest neighbour—a squatter like himself—lives at least a league off, and the most proximate 'settlement' is twice that distance from the spot he has chosen for his cabin. The smoke of his chimney mingles with that of no other; its tall column ascends to heaven, solitary as the squatter himself. The clearing is of an irregular semicircular shape—a deep, narrow stream forming the chord, and afterwards clearing its way through the otherwise unbroken forest; while in the convexity of the arc, at that point most remote from the water, stands the cabin—a log 'shanty' with 'cla'-board' roof—on one side flanked by a rude horse-shed, on the other by a corn-crib of split rails.

Such a picture is common enough in the backwoods of America; and some might deem it commonplace. For my part, I cannot regard it in this light. I have never looked upon this primitive homestead of the pioneer without being impressed with a peculiar feeling—one of pleasure. Something seems to impart to it an air of vague and mystic grandeur. Perhaps I associate the picture with the frame in which it is set—the magnificent forest that surrounds it, every aisle of which is redolent of romance. Such scenes are suggestive of border lore and legend—of perils by flood and field, always pleasant to be remembered—of desperate deeds of heroism performed by gallant

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pioneers, or their equally gallant antagonists—that red chivalry who once strode proudly along the forest-path, but whose upright forms are no longer seen under the shadow of its trees

Perhaps it is from reflections of this kind that I view with interest the clearing and cabin of the squatter; or perhaps it may be from having at one period encountered incidents in connection with such a scene, of a character never to be forgotten.

In a certain morning of mid-spring, perhaps the eye of the eagle soaring in the sky above, looked down upon just such a picture. If in winter it might be termed rude or commonplace, it now no longer merits the title: nature has girded on her robe of green, and by the touch of her magical wand, has toned down its rough features to an almost delicate softness. The young maize—planted in a soil that has lain fallow, perhaps for a thousand years—is rapidly culming upward; and the rich sheen of its long lance-like leaves, as they bend gracefully over, hides from view the sombre hues of the earth. The forest-trees appear with their foliage freshly expanded—some, as the tulip-tree, the dogwood, and the white magnolia, already in the act of inflorescence. The woods no longer maintain that monotonous silence which they have preserved throughout the winter: the red cardinal chatters among the cane: the blue jay screams in the pawpaw thicket—perhaps disturbed by the gliding of some slippery snake—while the mock-bird, regardless of such danger, from the top of a tall tulip-tree pours forth his matchless melody in sweet, ever-varying strain. The tiny bark of the squirrel, and the soft cooing of the Carolinian dove, may be heard among other sounds—the latter suggestive of earth's noblest passion, as its utterer is the emblem of devotion itself. Other sounds are heard, perhaps less agreeable to the ear: the shrill 'chirrup' of cicadas and tree-toads ringing so incessantly, that only when they cease, do you become conscious of their existence—the dull 'gluck-gluck' of the great bull-frog, and the hoarse croak of the black vultures (*aura* and *cathartes*), that, perched upon the

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tallest of the dead woods, press their foul beaks against its naked branches. Still less agreeable might appear the fierce miaulling of the red *puma*—who has not yet retired to his lair—or the howl of the gaunt wolf; but not so to the ears of the awakened hunter, who, through the chinks of his lone cabin, listens to such sounds with a savage joy.

These fierce notes are now rare and exceptional—even in the backwoods—though, unlike the war-whoop of the Indian, they have not altogether departed. Occasionally, their echo may be heard through the aisles of the forest, but only in its deepest recesses—only in those remote river 'bottoms' where the squatter delights to dwell. Even there, they are heard only at night and in the morning to give place to softer and sweeter sounds.

Fancy, then, a fine morning in June—a sunshine that turns all it touches into gold—an atmosphere laden with the perfume of wild-flowers—the hum of honey-seeking bees—the songs of birds commingling in sweetest melody—and you have the *mise en scène* of a squatter's cabin on the banks of the Obion, half an hour after the rising of the sun. Can such a picture be called *commonplace*?—rather say it is enchanting.

And well might this be said of it, the moment after. In another instant, the bright sunshine, the forest glories of green and gold, the bird-music among the trees, the flowery aroma in the air, were no longer needed to give grace to the clearing of squatter. It signified not that it was a morning in the middle of June: had it been the dreariest day of December, the effect would have been the same; and this resembled enchantment itself. The rude hut seemed at once changed into a palace—the dead trunks became Corinthian columns carved out of white marble—their stiff branches appeared to bend gracefully over, like the leaves of the recurvent *acanthus*—and the enclosure of carelessly tended maize-plants assumed the aspect of some fair garden of the Hesperides!

The explanation is easy. Magic is not needed to account for

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the transformation, since there exists a far more powerful form of enchantment in the divine presence of female beauty. And it was present there, in its distinct varieties of *dark* and *fair*—typified in the persons of two young girls who came forth from the cabin of the squatter: more than typified—completely symbolised—for in these two young girls there appeared not one point of resemblance, save the possession of a perfect beauty. The eye of the soaring eagle might not discover their charms—as did the bird of Jove those of the lovely Leda—but no *human* eye could have gazed for a moment on either one, without receiving the impression that it was looking upon the loveliest object on earth. This impression could only be altered, by turning to gaze upon the other.

Who are these young creatures? Sisters? There is nothing in their appearance to suggest the gentle relationship. One is tall, dark, and dark-haired, of that golden-brown complexion usually styled *brunette*. Her nose is slightly aquiline, and her eye of the oblique Indian type. Other features present an Indian character, especially observable in the nation of the Chicasaws, the former lords of this great forest. She may have Indian blood in her veins, but her complexion is too light for that of a pure Indian.

Her dress strengthens the impression that she is a *half-blood*. The skirt is of the common home-spun of the backwoods, striped with a yellowish dye; but the green bodice is of finer stuff, with more pretensions to style; and her neck and wrists are embraced by a variety of those glancing circlets, so seductive in the eyes of an Indian belle. The buskin-moccasin is purely Indian, and its lines of bead-embroidery gracefully adapt themselves to the outlines of feet and ankles of perfect form. The absence of a head-dress is another point of Indian resemblance. The luxuriant black hair is plaited, and coiled like a coronet around the head. There are no combs or pins of gold, but in their place a red flower—the trumpet-shaped blossom of a *bignonia*. This,

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set coquettishly behind the plaits, shews that some little attention has been given to the toilet; and simple though it be, the peculiar *coiffure* imparts that air usually styled 'commanding.'

Although there is nothing masculine in this young girl's beauty. a single glance at her features impresses you with the idea of a character of no ordinary kind—a nature more resolute than tender—a heart endowed with courage equalling that of a man. The idea is strengthed by the observation, that in her hand she carries a light rifle; while a horn and bullet-pouch, suspended from her left shoulder, hang under the right arm. She is not the only backwoods maiden who may be seen thus armed and accoutered; many are even skilled in the use of the deadly weapon!

In striking contrast with all this is the appearance of her companion. The impression the eye receives in looking on the latter is that of something soft and beautiful, of a glorious golden hue: it is the reflection of bright amber-coloured hair on a blond skin tinted with vermilion, imparting a sort of luminous radiance divinely feminine. Scrutinise this countenance more closely; and you perceive that the features are in perfect harmony with each other, and harmonise with the complexion. You behold a face, such as the Athenian fancy has elaborated into an almost living reality in the goddess Cytherea.

This creature of golden roseate hue is yet very young—scarcely more than a child; but in the blue sky above her burns a fiery sun; and in twelve months she will be a woman.

Her costume is still more simple than that of her companion: a sleeved dress of the same striped home-spun, loosely worn, and open at the breast; her fine amber-coloured hair the only covering for her head—as it is the only shawl upon her shoulders over which it falls in ample luxuriance. A string of pearls around her neck—false pearls, poor thing!—is the only effort that vanity seems to have made, for there is no other adornment. Even shoes and stockings are wanting; but the most costly *chaussure* could not add to the elegance of those little *mignon* feet.

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Who are they—these fair flowers of the forest?

Let the mystery end. They *are* sisters, though not the children of one mother; they are the daughters of the hunter—the owner of the cabin and clearing—his only children.

Happy hunter! poor you may be, and your home lowly; it can never be lonely in such companionship. The proudest prince may envy you the possession of two such treasures—beyond parallel, beyond price!

CHAPTER II.

MARIAN AND LILIAN.

Passing outward from the door, the two young girls paused in their steps; an object had attracted their attention. A large dog was seen running out from the shed, a gaunt, fierce-looking animal, that answered to the very appropriate name of 'Wolf.' He approached the sisters, and saluted them with an unwilling wag of his tail. It seemed as though he could not look pleased even while seeking a favour—for this was evidently the purpose that had brought him forth from his lair in the shed. He appealed especially to the older of the girls—Marian.

'Ho, Wolf, I see your sides are thin, old fellow: you want your breakfast? What can we give him, Lil?'

'Indeed, sister, I know not what.'

'There is some deer-meat inside?'

'Ah, I fear father will not allow Wolf to have that. I heard him say he expected one to take dinner with him to-day? You know who?'

An arch smile accompanied the half-interrogatory; but for all that, the words did not appear to produce a pleasant effect. On

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the contrary, a shade was observable on the brow of her to whom they were addressed.

'Yes, I *do* know. Well, he shall not dine with *me*. 'Tis just for that I've brought out my rifle. To-day, I intend to make my dinner in the woods, or go without, and that's more likely. Never fear, Wolf! you shall have your breakfast, whether I get my dinner or not. Now, for the life of me, Lil, I don't know what we can give the poor dog. Those buzzards are just within range; I could bring one of *them* down; but the filthy creatures, ugh! even a dog won't eat them.'

'See, sister! yonder is a squirrel. Wolf will eat squirrels, I know: but ah! it's a pity to kill the little creature.'

Not a bit. Yon little creature is a precious little thief; it's just been at our corn-crib. By killing it, I do justice in a double sense. I punish the thief, and reward the good dog. Here goes!'

The squirrel, scared from its depredation on the corn, swept nimbly over the ground towards the nearest tree. Wolf having espied it, rushed after in headlong pursuit. But it is a rare chance indeed when a dog captures one of these animals upon the ground; and Wolf, as usual, was unsuccessful.

He had 'treed' the squirrel; but what of that? The nimble creature, having swooped up to a high limb, seated itself there, and looked down upon its impotent pursuer with a nonchalant defiance—at intervals more emphatically expressing this sentiment by a saucy jerk of its tail. But this false security proved the squirrel's ruin. Deceived by it, the silly animal made no effort to conceal its body behind the branch; but, sitting upright in a fork, presented a fair mark to the rifle.

The girl raised the piece to her shoulder, took aim, and fired.

The shot told; and the tiny victim, hurled from its high perch, —after making several somersaults in the air—fell right into the jaws of that hungry savage at the bottom of the tree.

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Wolf made his breakfast upon the squirrel.

This young Diana of the backwoods appeared in no way astonished at the feat she had performed; nor yet Lilian. Doubtless, it was an every-day deed.

'You must learn to shoot, Lil.'

'O sister, for what purpose? You know I have neither the taste nor skill for it that you have.'

'The skill you will acquire by practice. It is worth knowing how, I can assure you: besides, it is an accomplishment one might stand in need of some day. Why, do you know, sister, in the times of the Indians, every girl understood how to manage a rifle?—so father says. True, the fighting Indians are gone away from here, but what if you were to meet a great bear in the woods?'

'Surely I should run away from him.'

And surely I shouldn't, Lil. I have never met a bear, but I'd just like to try one.'

Dear sister, you frighten me. Oh, do not think of such a thing! Indeed, Marian, I am never happy when you are away in the woods; I am always afraid of your meeting with some great wild beast, which may devour you. Tell me why do you go? I am sure I cannot see what pleasure you can have in being in the woods alone.'

'Alone! Ha, ha! Perhaps I am not *always alone*.' This was said in a low voice, not loud enough for Lilian to hear the words, though she observed the smile that accompanied their utterance.

'You see, sister Lil,' continued Marian in a louder tone, 'our tastes differ; you are young, and like better to read the story-books your mother left you, and look at the pictures in them. My mother left me no story-books nor pictures; she had none, and did not care for them, I fancy. She was half-Indian, you know; and I suppose I am like her: for I too prefer realities to pictures. I love to roam about in the woods; and as for the danger—pooh, pooh—I have no fear of that. I fear neither bear

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nor panther, nor any other quadruped. Ha, ha! I have more fear of a two-legged creature I know of; and I should be in more danger of meeting with that animal by *staying at home.*'

These words appeared to give rise to a train of reflections in which there was bitterness. The heroine of the rifle remained silent while in the act of reloading her rifle, and the tinge of melancholy that pervaded her countenance told that her thoughts were abstracted. While priming the piece, she was even *maladroit* enough to spill a large quantity of the powder, but not from any lack of practice or dexterity.

Lilian had heard the concluding words of her sister's speech with some surprise, and also noticed the abstracted air. She was about to ask for an explanation, when the dialogue was interrupted. Wolf rushed past with a fierce growl: some one approached the clearing.

A horseman—a man of about thirty years of age, of spare form and somewhat sinister aspect—a face to be hated on sight. And at sight of it the shadow deepened on the brow of Marian.

Her sister exhibited no particular emotion. The new-comer was no stranger: It was only Josh Stebbins, the schoolmaster of Swampville. He was their father's friend, and came often to visit them: moreover, he was that day expected, as Lilian knew. Only in one way did she show any interest in his arrival; and that was, on observing that he was better dressed than usual. The *cut* of his dress, too, was different.

'See, sister Marian,' cried she, laughing as she spoke, 'how fine Mister Josh is! black cloth coat and waistcoat—with a standing collar, too! Why, he is exactly like the Methody minister of Swampville! May be he has turned one. I shouldn't wonder, for they say he is very learned. Well, if that be, we may hear him preach at the next camp-meeting. How I should like to hear him hold forth!—ha, ha, ha!'

The young creature laughed heartily at her own fantastic con-

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cents; and her clear, silvery voice for a moment silenced the birds, as if they paused to listen to a music more melodious than their own. The mock-bird echoed back the laugh; but not so Marian. She had observed the novelty as well as her sister; but it appeared to impress her in a very different manner. She did not even smile at the approach of the stranger; but on the contrary the cloud upon her brow became a shade darker.

Marian was some years older than her sister—old enough to know that there was *evil* in the world: for neither is the 'backwoods' the home of an Arcadian innocence.

She knew the schoolmaster sufficiently to dislike him; and, from his appearance, one would have given her credit for having formed a correct estimate of his character. She suspected the object of his visit; more than that, she knew it; *she was herself its object*. With indifferent grace, therefore, did she receive him: scarcely concealing her aversion as she bade him the customary welcome.

Without being gifted with any very acute perception, the new comer might have observed the distaste of the young girl at his presence. He look no notice of it, however, either by word or the movement of a feature. On the contrary, he appeared perfectly indifferent to the character of the reception given him. Not that his manner betrayed anything like swagger—for he was evidently not one of the swaggering sort; rather was his behaviour characterised by a cool, quiet effrontery—a sort of sarcastic assurance—ten times more irritating. This was displayed in the laconic style of his salutation; 'Morning, girls! father at home?'—in the fact of his dismounting without waiting to be invited—in sharply scolding the dog out of his way as he led his horse to the shed; and in finally throwing the saddle-bags over his arm, and stepping inside the cabin-door, with the air of one who is not only master of the house, but of the 'situation.'

Inside the door, he was received by the squatter himself; and in the exchange of salutations, a close observer might have noted

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a remarkable difference in the manner of the two men; the guest cool, cynical, confident; the host agitated, with eye unsteady, and heart ill at ease. There was a strange significance in the salutation, as also in the little incident that followed. Before a dozen words had passed between the two men, the schoolmaster turned quietly upon his heel, and closed the door behind him—the squatter making no objection to the act, either by word or gesture!

The incident might appear of trifling importance; but not so to Marian, who stood near, watching every movement, and listening to every word. Why was the door closed, and by Josh Stebbins?—that rude door, that, throughout the long summer day, was accustomed to hang open on its raw-hide hinges? All day, and often all night—except during the cold wintry winds, or when rain-storms blew from the west! Why was it now closed and thus unceremoniously? No wonder that Marian attached a significance to the act.

Neither had she failed to note the agitated mien of her father while receiving his visitor—that father, at all other times, and in the presence of all other people, so bold, fierce, and impassible! She observed all this with a feeling of pain. For such strange conduct, reflected she, there must be a cause, and a serious one.

The young girl stood for some moments in the attitude she had assumed. Her sister had gone aside to pluck some flowers growing by the bank of the stream, and Marian was now alone. Her eye was bent upon the door, and she appeared to hesitate between two thoughts. Should she approach and listen? She knew a *little*—she desired to know *more*.

She had not conjectured the object of the schoolmaster's visit; she was *certain* it concerned herself. It was not simply that that troubled her spirits; left to herself, she would have made light of such a suitor, and given him his *congé* with a brusque promptitude. But her father—why does *he* yield to the solicitations of this man? That is the mystery she desires to unravel.

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Could it be a *debt*? Scarcely that. In the lawless circle of backwoods society, the screw of the creditor has but little power over the victim of debt—certainly not enough to enslave such a free, fearless spirit as that of Hickman Holt. The girl knew this, and hence her painful suspicions that pointed to some *other cause*. What cause? She would know.

She made one step towards the house, as if bent upon espionage. Again she paused, and appeared undecided. The chinks between the logs were open all around the hut—so, too, the interstices between the hewn planks of the door. No one could approach near to the walls without being seen from the inside; and a listener would be sure of being discovered.

Was it this reflection that stayed her in her steps? that caused her to turn back? Or did the action spring from a nobler motive?

Whichever it was, it seemed to bring about a change in her determination: for suddenly turning away, she stood facing the forest—as if with the intention of launching herself into its sombre depths.

A call of adieu to her sister—a signal to Wolf to follow—and she was gone.

Whither, and for what purpose? Why loves she these lone rambles under the wild wood shade? She has declared that she delights in them; but can we trust her declaration? True, hers is a strange spirit—tinged, no doubt, with the moral tendencies of her mother's race—in which the love of solitude is almost an idiosyncrasy. But with her this forest ranging is almost a new practice: only for a month or so has she been indulging in this romantic habit—so incomprehensible to her home-loving sister. Her father puts no check upon such inclinations: on the contrary, he encourages them, as if proud of his daughter's *penchant* for the chase. Though purely a white man, his nature has been Indianised by the habits of his life; and in his eyes, the chase is the noblest accomplishment—even for a woman!

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Does the fair Marian think so? or has she another motive for absenting herself so frequently from her home?

Let us follow her into the forest: here, perhaps, we may find a clue to the enigma.

CHAPTER III.

THE LOVERS' RENDEZVOUS.

Glance into the forest-glade! It is an opening in the woods—a *clearing* not made by the labour of human hands, but a work of Nature herself—a spot of earth where the great timber grows not, but in its place shrubs and tender grass, plants and perfumed flowers.

About a mile distant from the cabin of Hickman Holt, just such an opening is found—in superficial extent about equal to the squatter's clearing. It lies in the midst of a forest of tall trees—among which are conspicuous the tulip-tree, the white magnolia, cotton-woods, and giant oaks. Those that immediately encircle it are of less stature: graduating inward to its edge, like the seats in an amphitheatre—as if the forest trees stooped downward to kiss the fair flowers that sparkle upon the glade.

These lesser trees are of various species. They are the sassafras laurel, famed for its sanitary sap; the noble Carolina bay, with its aromatic leaves; the red mulberry; and the singular Osage orange-tree (*maclura aurantica*), the 'bow-wood' of the Indians. The pawpaw also is present, to attest the extreme richness of the soil; but the flowering plants, that flourish in profuse luxuriance over the glade, are sufficient evidence of its fertility. Why the trees grow not there, is one of nature's secrets not yet revealed to man.

It is easier to say why a squatter's cabin is not there. There

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is no mystery about this: though there might appear to be, since the *clearing* is found ready to hand. The explanation is simple the glade is a mile distant from water—the nearest being that of the creek already mentioned as running past the cabin of the squatter.

Thus nature, as if jealous of this pretty wild-wood garden, protects it from the defilement of man.

Nevertheless, the human presence is not unknown to it. On this very morning—this fair morning in June, that has disclosed to our view the cabin and clearing of the squatter—a man may be observed entering the glade. His light elastic step, his lithe agile form, his smooth face, all bespeak his youth; while the style of his dress, his arms and equipments, proclaim his calling to be that of a hunter.

He is a man of the correct size, and, it may be added, of the correct shape—that is, one with whose figure the eye finds no fault. It is pleased at beholding a certain just distribution of the members, promising strength and activity for the accomplishment of any possible physical end.

The countenance is equally expressive of good mental qualities The features are regular and open, to frankness. A prominent chin denotes firmness; a soft hazel eye, gentleness; and a full rounded throat, intrepid daring.

There is neither beard upon the chin nor moustache upon the lip—not that the face is too young for either, but both have been shaven off. In the way of hair, a magnificent *chevelure* of brown curls ruffles out under the rim of his cap, shadowing over the cheeks and neck of the wearer. Arched eye-brows, a small mouth, and regular teeth, give the finish to a face which might be regarded as the type of manly beauty.

And yet this beauty appears under a russet garb. There is no evidence of excessive toilet-care. The brush and comb have been but sparingly used; and neither perfume nor pomatum has been employed to heighten the shine of those luxuriant curls.

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There is sun-tan on the face, that, perhaps, with the aid of soap *might* be taken off; but it is permitted to remain. The teeth, too, might be made whiter with a dentifrice and brush; but in all likelihood the nearest approach to their having ever been cleansed has been while chewing a piece of tough deer-meat.

Nevertheless, without any artificial aids, the young man's beauty proclaims itself in every feature—the more so, perhaps, that in gazing upon his face, you are impressed with the idea that there is an 'outcome' in it.

In his dress there is not much that could be altered for the better. The hunting-shirt, of finest buckskin leather, with its fringed cape and skirt, hangs upon his body with all the grace of an Athenian tunic; while its open front permits to be seen the manly contour of his breast, but half concealed under the softer fawnskin. The wrappers of green baize, though folded more than once around his legs, do not hide their elegant *tournure*; and an appropriate covering for his feet is a pair of strong moccasins, soled with thick leather. A coon-skin cap sits high upon his head, slightly inclined to the right. With the visage of the animal turned to the front, and the full plume-like tail, with its alternate rings, drooping to the shoulder, it forms a head-dress that is far from ungraceful. A belt around the waist—a short hunting-knife in the sheath—a large powder-horn hanging below the arm-pit—a bullet-pouch underneath, and *voilà tout!* No not all; there remains to be mentioned the rifle—the arm *par excellence* of the American hunter.

The portrait is that of Frank Wingrove—a dashing young backwoodsman, whose calling is the chase.

The hunter has entered the glade, and is advancing across it. He walks slowly, but without caution—without that habitual stealthy tread that distinguishes the sons of St. Hubert in the west. On the contrary, his step is free, and the flowers are crushed under his feet. He is not even silent, but humming a tune as he goes. Notwithstanding that he appears accoutred for

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the chase, his movements are not those of one in pursuit of game For this morning, at least, he is out upon a different errand; and judging from his jovial aspect, it should be one of pleasure; the birds themselves seem not more gay.

On emerging from the shadows of the tall trees into the open glade effulgent with flowers, his gaiety seems to have reached its climax: it breaks forth in song, and for some minutes the forest re-echoes the well-known lay of '*Woodman spare that tree.*'

Whence this joyous humour? Why are those eyes sparkling with a scarce concealed triumph? Is there a sweetheart expected. Is the glade to be the scene of a love-interview—that glade perfumed and flowery, as if formed for such a purpose?

The conjecture is reasonable: the young hunter has the air of one who keeps an assignation—one, too, who dreams not of disappointment.

Near the edge of the glade, on the side opposite to that by which the hunter has come in, is a fallen tree; its branches and bark have long since disappeared, and the trunk is bleached to a brilliant white. In the phraseology of the backwoods, it is no longer a tree, but a 'log.' Toward this the hunter advances, and, on arriving at the log, seats himself upon it, in the attitude of one who does not anticipate being long alone.

There is a path that runs across the glade bisecting it into two nearly equal parts. It is a tiny track, evidently not much used. It conducts from the stream on which stands the cabin of the squatter Holt, to another 'fork' of the same river, the Obion, where clearings are numerous, and where there is also a large settlement bearing the dignified title of 'town.' It is the town of Swampville—a name perhaps more appropriate than euphonious.

Upon this path, where it debouches from the forest, the eye of Frank Wingrove becomes fixed—not in the direction of Swampville, but toward the clearing of the squatter. From this it is now evident that he expects some one, and that the person expected is to come from that side.

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A good while passes, and yet no one appears. The hunter begins to manifest signs of impatience. As if to kill time, he repeatedly rises, and reseats himself. With his eye, he measures the altitude of the sun—the watch of the backwoodsman—and as the bright orb rises higher in the heavens, his spirits appear to sink in proportion. His look is no longer cheerful. He has long since finished his song; and his voice is now heard, only when he utters an ejaculation of impatience.

All at once the joyous expression is restored. There is a noise in the woods, and it proceeds from the right direction; a rustling of dead leaves that litter the path, and occasionally the 'swish' of recoiling branches. Some one approaches the glade.

The young hunter springs to his feet, and stands listening. Presently, he hears voices; but he hears them rather with surprise than pleasure—as is indicated by another quick change passing over his countenance. The cheerful aspect has again given place to a look of disappointment—this time approaching to chagrin.

'Thar's talk goin' on,' mutters he to himself. 'Then she's not alone! thar's someb'dy along wi' her. Who the darnation can it be?'

After this characteristic soliloquy, he remains silent—listening far more eagerly than before.

The noises become more distinct, and the voices louder. More than one can be distinguished mingling in the conversation.

For some seconds, the hunter maintains his attentive attitude, his eye sternly fixed upon the *embouchure* of the path.

His suspense is of short duration. Hearing the voices more plainly, he recognises their tones; and the recognition appears to give a sudden turn to his thoughts. The expression of chagrin gives place to one of simple disappointment.

'Bah!' exclaims he, throwing himself back upon the dead wood 'It aint *her*, after all! It's only a gang o' them rovin' redskins. What, in Old Nick's name, fetches 'em this away an' jest at this time too?'

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After a moment's reflection, he starts up from the log, continuing to mutter: I must hide, or they'll be for havin' a parley. That ud never do, for I guess *she* can't be far off by this. Hang the crooked luck!'

With this elegant finish, the speaker glides rapidly round the end of the fallen tree, and makes for the nearest underwood—evidently with the design of screening himself from sight. He is too late—as the 'ugh' uttered on the opposite side of the glade convinces him—and, changing his intention, he fronts round, and quietly returns to his former position upon the log.

The hunter's conjecture has proved correct. Bronzed faces show themselves over the tops of the bushes on the opposite edge of the glade; and the moment after, three Indians emerge into the open ground. That they are Indians, their tatterdemalion dress of coloured blankets, leggins, and moccasins would indicate; but their race is even recognizable in their mode of march. Though there are but three of them, and their path runs no longer among trees, they follow one another in single file, and in the true typical 'trot' of the red aboriginal.

The presence of Indians in these woods requires explanation—for their tribe has long before this time been transported to their new lands west of the Mississippi. It only needs to be said that a few families have preferred to remain—some from attachment to the scenes of their youth, not to be severed by the prospect of a far happier home—some from associations formed with the whites—and some from more trivial causes—perhaps from being the degraded outcasts of their tribes. Throughout the whole region of the backwoods, their still exist a sparse population of the indigenous race: dwelling, as their ancestors did, under tents or in the open air; trafficking in small articles of their own manufacture; in short, performing very much the same *métier* as the Gitanos in Europe. There are other points of resemblance between these two races—amounting almost to a family likeness—

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and which fairly entitles the Indians to an appellation sometimes bestowed upon them—*the Gipsies of the New World.*

The three Indians who have entered the glade are manifestly what is termed an 'Indian family,' or part of one. They are father, and mother, and daughter—the last a girl nearly grown.

The man is in the lead, the woman follows, and the young girl brings up the rear. They are bent upon a journey, and its object is also manifest. The pannier borne upon the back of the woman, containing fox and coon skins, with little coloured baskets of wicker—with the bead-embroidered moccasins and wampum belts that appear in the hands of the girl—bespeaks a purposed visit to the settlement of Swampville.

True to the customs 'of his fathers,' the Indian himself carries nothing; if we except a long rusty gun over his shoulder, and a small hatchet in his belt, rendering him rather a formidable fellow on his way to a market.

CHAPTER IV.

THE CATASTROPHE OF A KISS.

The log on which the young hunter has seated himself is some paces distant from the path. He has a slight knowledge of this Indian family, and simply nods to them as they pass. He does not speak lest a word should bring on a conversation—for the avoidance of which he has a powerful motive. The Indian makes no halt, but strides silently onward, followed by his pannier-laden squaw. The girl, however, pauses in her steps, as if struck by some thought.

The action quickly follows the thought; and turning out of

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the path she approaches the spot where Frank Wingrove is seated.

What wants she with the young pale-face? Can this be the *she* he has been expecting with such impatience? Surely not!

And yet the girl is by no means ill-looking. In her black, oblique eyes there is a certain sweetness of expression; and a tinge of purple-red, bursting through the bronze of her cheeks, lends to her countenance a peculiar charm. Add to this, luxuriant black hair, and a bosom of bold outlines—which the sparse, savage costume but half conceals—and you have a portrait something more than pretty. Many a time and oft, in the history of backwoods life, has the heart of the proud pale-face offered sacrifice at such a shrine. Is this, then, the expected one?

No. Her actions answer the question; and his too: he has not even risen to receive her, but keeps his seat upon the log, regarding her approach with a glance of indifference, not unmingled with a slight shade of displeasure.

Her object is presently apparent. A bullet-pouch of white buckskin, richly worked with porcupine quills, is hanging over her arm. On arriving before the hunter, she holds it out, as if about to present it. One might fancy that such is her intention; and that the pouch is designed as a *gage d'amour;* but the word 'dollar,' which accompanies the offer, precludes the possibility of such a silly supposition. It is not thus that an Indian girl makes love. She is simply soliciting the pale-face to purchase.

In this design she is almost certain to be successful. The pouch proclaims its value, and promises to sell itself. Certainly it is a beautiful object, with its quills of brilliant dye, and richly embroidered shoulder-strap. Perhaps no object could be held up before the eyes of Frank Wingrove, more likely to elicit his admiration.

He sees and admires: he knows its value. It is cheap at a dollar; besides, he was just thinking of treating himself to such a one. His old catskin is worn and greasy. He has grown fasti

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dious of late, for reasons that may be guessed. This beautiful pouch would sit well over his new hunting-shirt, and trick him out to a T. In the eyes of Marian——

His desire to become the possessor of the coveted article, hinders him from continuing the reflection. Fortunately his old pouch contains the required coin; and in another instant a silver dollar glances in the palm of the Indian girl.

But the 'goods' are not delivered over in the ordinary manner. A thought seems to strike the fair huckster; and she stands a moment gazing upon the face of the handsome purchaser. Is it curiosity? or is it, perhaps, some softer emotion that has suddenly germinated in her soul?

Her hesitation lasts only for an instant. With a smile that seems to solicit, she approaches nearer to the hunter. The pouch is held aloft, with the strap extended between her hands. Her design is evident—she purposes to adjust it upon his shoulders.

The young hunter does not repel the proffered service—how could he? It would not be Frank Wingrove to do so. On the contrary, he leans his body forward to aid in the action.

The attitude brings their faces almost close together: their lips are within two inches of touching!

For a moment the girl appears to have forgotten her purpose, or else she executes it in a manner sufficiently *maladroit*. In passing the strap over the high coonskin cap, her fingers become entangled in the brown curls beneath. Her eyes are not directed that way: they are gazing with a basilisk glance into the eyes of the hunter.

The attitude of Wingrove is at first shrinking; but a slight smile curling upon his lip, betokens that there is not much pain in the situation. A reflection, however, made at the moment, chases away the smile. It is this:

'Tarnal earthquakes! were Marian to see me now! she'd never believe but that I'm in love with this young squaw; she's been jealous o' her already.'

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But the reflection passes; and with it for an instant the remembrance of 'Marian.' The sweetest smelling flower is that which is nearest—so sings the honey-bee. Human blood cannot bear the proximity of those pretty lips; and the kindness of the Indian maiden must be recompensed by a kiss.

She makes no resistance; she utters no cry; their lips meet—but the kiss is interrupted, ere it can be achieved.

The bark of a dog—followed by a half-suppressed scream in a female voice—causes the interruption.

The hunter starts back, looking aghast; the Indian exhibits only surprise. Both together glance across the glade: Marian Holt is standing up on the opposite edge!

Wingrove's cheek has turned red; fear and shame are depicted upon his face. In his confusion he pushes the Indian aside—more rudely than gently.

'Go!' he exclaims in an under voice. 'For God's sake, go!—you have ruined me!'

The girl obeys the request and gesture—both sufficiently rude after such sweet complaisance. She obeys, however, and moves off from the spot—not without reproach in her glance, and reluctance in her steps.

Before reaching the path, she pauses; turns in her track; and then rushes swiftly back towards the hunter.

Wingrove stands astonished—half affrighted. Before he can recover himself, or divine her intent, the Indian is once more by his side.

She snatches the pouch from his shoulders—the place where her own hands had suspended it—then, flinging the silver coin at his feet, and uttering in a loud angry tone the words, 'False pale-face!' she turns from the spot, and glides rapidly away.

In another moment, she has entered the forest-path, and is lost to the sight.

The scene has been short—of only a moment's duration. Marian has not moved, from the moment she uttered that wild

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half-suppressed scream. She stands silent and transfixed, as if its utterance had deprived her of speech and motion. Her fine form picturesquely draped with bodice and skirt—the moccasin buskins upon her feet—the coiled coronet of shining hair surmounting her head—the rifle in her hand, resting on its butt, as it had been dashed mechanically down—the huge gaunt dog by her side: all these outlined upon the green background of the forest leaves, impart to the maiden an appearance at once majestic and imposing. Standing thus immobile, she suggests the idea of some rival huntress, whom Diana, from jealousy, has suddenly transformed into stone.

But her countenance betrays that she is no statue. The colour of her cheeks—alternately flushing red and pale—and the indignant flash of that fiery eye, tell you that you look upon a living woman—one who breathes and burns under the influence of a terrible emotion.

Wingrove is half frantic; he scarcely knows what to say or what to do. In his confusion, he advances towards her, calling her by name; but before he has half crossed the glade, her words fall upon his ear, causing him to hesitate and falter in his steps.

'Frank Wingrove!' she cries, 'come not near me; your road lies the other way. Go! follow your Indian damsel. You will find her at Swampville, no doubt selling her cheap kisses to triflers like yourself. Traitor! we meet no more!'

Without waiting for a reply, or even to note the effect of her words, Marian Holt steps back into the forest, and disappears.

The young hunter is too stupefied to follow. With 'false pale-face' ringing in one ear, and 'traitor' in the other, he knows not in what direction to turn.

At length the log falls under his eye; and striding mechanically towards it, he sits down—to reflect upon the levity of his conduct, and the unpleasant consequences of an unhallowed kiss.

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CHAPTER V.

SQUATTER AND SAINT.

Return we to the squatter's cabin—this time to enter it.

Inside, there is not much to be seen or described. The interior consists of a single room—of which the log-walls are the sides, and the clapboard roof the ceiling. In one corner there is a little partition or screen—the materials composing it being skins of the black bear, and deer-hides. It is pleasant to look upon this partition: it is the shrine of modesty and virgin innocence: it proves that the squatter is not altogether a savage.

Rude as is the interior of the shelling, it contains a few relics of bygone, better days—not spent there, but elsewhere. Some books are seen upon a little shelf—the library of Lilian's mother—and one or two pieces of furniture, that have once been decent, if not stylish. But chattels of this kind are scarce in the backwoods—even in the houses of more pretentious people than a squatter; and a log-stool or two, a table of split poplar planks, an iron pot, some pans and pails of tin, a few plates and pannikins of the same material, a gourd 'dipper' or drinking cup, and half-a-dozen iron knives, forks, and spoons, of the commonest kind, constitute the whole 'plenishing' of the hut.

The skin of a cougar, not long killed, hangs against the wall; beside it are the pelts of other wild animals, as the gray fox, the raccoon, the rufous lynx, musk-rats and minks. These, draping the rough, gray logs, rob them to some extent of their naked ness

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By the door is suspended an old saddle, of the fashion known as *American*—a sort of cross between the high-peaked *silla* of the Mexicans, and the flat, pad-like English saddle; and on the adjacent peg hangs a bridle to match—its reins black with age and its bit reddened with rust.

Some light articles of female apparel are seen hanging against the wall, near that sacred precinct where, during the night-hours, repose the fair daughters of the squatter.

It is a rude dwelling indeed—a rough casket to contain a pair of jewels so sparkling and priceless.

Just now, it is occupied by two individuals of a very different character—two men already mentioned—the hunter Hickman Holt, and his visitor Josh Stebbins, the schoolmaster of Swampville. The personal appearance of the latter has been already half described. It deserves a more detailed delineation. His probable age has been already stated—about thirty. His spare figure and ill-omened aspect have been alluded to. Add to this low stature, a tripe-coloured skin, a beardless face, a shrinking chin, a nose sharp-pointed and peekish, lank black hair falling over the forehead, and hanging down almost low enough to shadow a pair of deep-set, weasel-like eyes—give to this combination of features a slightly sinister aspect, and you have the portrait of Josh Stebbins. It is not easy to tell the cause of this sinister expression, for the features are not irregular; and, but for its bilious colour, the face could scarcely be termed ill-looking. The eyes do not squint; and the thin lips appear making a constant effort to look smiling and saintlike. Perhaps it is this *outward* affectation of the saintly character—belying, as it evidently does, the spirit within—that produces the unfavourable impression. In earlier youth, the face may have been better favoured; but a career, spent in the exercise of evil passions, has left more than one 'blase' upon it.

It is difficult to reconcile such a career with the demeanour of the man, and especially with his present occupation; but Josh

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Stebbins has not always been a schoolmaster; and the pedagogue of a border settlement is not necessarily expected to be a model of morality. Even if it were so, this lord of the hickory switch is comparatively a stranger in Swampville; and, perhaps, only the best side of his character has been exhibited to the parents and guardians of the settlement. That is of the saintl order; and, as if to strengthen the illusion, a dress of clerical cut has been assumed, as also a white cravat, and black broad-brimmed hat. The coat, waistcoat, and trousers are of broadcloth—though not of the finest quality. It is just such a costume as might be worn by one of the humbler class of Methodist border ministers, or by a Catholic priest—a somewhat rarer bird in the backwoods. Josh Stebbins is neither one nor the other; although, as will shortly appear, his assumption of the ecclesiastical style is not altogether confined to his dress; of late he has also affected the clerical calling. The *ci devant* attorney's clerk—whilom the schoolmaster of Swampville—is now an 'Apostle'—an 'Elder' of the 'Latter-day Saints.'

The character is new—the faith itself is not very old—for the events we are relating occurred during the first decade of the Mormon revelation. Even Holt himself is only now made aware of the change: as would appear from a certain air of astonishment, with which he regards the clerical habiliments of his visitor.

It would be difficult to imagine a greater contrast, than that presented in the appearance of these two men. Were we to select two parallel types from the animal world, they would be the sly fox and the grizzly bear—the latter represented by the squatter himself.

In Hickman Holt we behold a personage of unwonted aspect—a man of gigantic stature—with a beard reaching to the second button of his coat, and a face not to be looked upon without a sensation of terror—a countenance expressive of determined courage, but at the same time of fierceness, untempered by

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any trace of softer emotion. The shaggy sand-coloured beard slightly grizzled—eyebrows like a *chevaux de frise* of hogs' bristles—eyes of a greenish gray—with a broad, livid scar across the left cheek—are component parts in producing this aspect; while a red cotton handkerchief wound turban-like around the head, and pulled low down in front, renders its expression more palpable and pronounced.

A loose coat of thick green blanket, somewhat faded and worn, adds to the colossal appearance of the man; while a red flannel shirt serves him also for a vest. His huge limbs are inserted in pantaloons of blue Kentucky 'jeans:' but these are scarcely visible—as the skirt of the ample blanket-coat drapes down so as to cover the tops of a pair of rough horse-skin boots, that reach to the knee. The costume is common enough on the banks of the Mississippi; the colossal form is not rare; but the fierce, repulsive face—that is more individual.

Is this the father of Marian and Lilian? Is it possible that from so rude a stem could spring such graceful branches—flowers so fair and lovely? If so, then must the mothers of both have been beautiful beyond common!

It is even true, and true that both were beautiful—*were*, for they are gone, and Hickman Holt is twice a widower. Long ago, he buried the half-blood mother of Marian; and at a later period—though still years ago—her gentle, golden-haired successor was carried to an early grave.

The latter event occurred in one of the settlements, nearer to the region of civilised life. There was a murmur of mystery about the second widowhood of Hickman Holt—which only became hushed on his 'moving' further west, to the wild forest where we now find him. Here no one knows aught of his past life or history—one only excepted—and that is the man who is to-day his visitor.

* * * * * * *

Contrasting the two men—regarding the superior size and more

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formidable aspect of the owner of the cabin, you would expect his guest to make some show of obeisance to him. On the contrary, it is the squatter who shows signs of complaisance: saluting his visitor with an air of embarrassment, but ill concealed under the words of welcome with which he receives him. Throughout the scene of salutation, the latter has maintained his characteristic demeanor of half-smiling, half-sneering coolness. In their behaviour to one another, even a careless observer could perceive that the smaller man is the *master*.

CHAPTER VI.

AN APOSTOLIC EFFORT.

The morning needed no fire, but there were embers upon the clay-hearth—some smouldering ends of fagots—over which the breakfast had been cooked. On one side of these the squatter placed a stool for his visitor; and then himself, as if mechanically, on the other side. A table of rough-hewn planks stood between; on this was a bottle containing maize-corn whisky—or 'bald-face,' as it is more familiarly known in the backwoods—two cracked tea-cups to drink it out of, a couple of corn-cob pipes, and some black tobacco.

All these preparations had been made beforehand; and confirmed, what had dropped from the lips of Lilian, that the visitor had been expected.

Beyond the customary phrases of salutation, not a word was exchanged between host and guest, until both had seated themselves. The squatter then commenced the conversation.

'Yev hed a long ride, Josh,' said he, leaning towards the table, and clutching hold of the bottle: 'try a taste of this hyar *rot-gut*—'taint the daintiest 'o drink to offer a man so genteelly

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dressed as you are this mornin'; but thar's wuss licker in these hyar back'oods, I reckon. Will ye mix? Thar's water in the jug.'

'No water for me,' was the laconic reply.

'Yur right thar. It's from old Hatcher's still—whar they us'ally put the water in afore they give it to you. I suppose they do it to save a fellur the trouble o' mixin—ha, ha, ha!

The squatter laughed at his own jest—not as if he enjoyed it to any great extent, but rather as if desirous of putting his visitor in good humour. The only evidence of his success was a dry smile, that curled upon the thin lip of the saint rather sarcastically than otherwise.

There was silence, while both drank; and Holt was again under the necessity of beginning the conversation. As already known, he had noticed the altered style of the schoolmaster's costume; and it was to this transformation that his next speech alluded.

'Why, Josh,' said he, attempting an easy, off-hand style of talk, 'you're bran new, spick-span, from head to foot! Ye look for all the world jest like one o' them ere cantin' critters o' preechers I often see prowlin' about Swampville. Durn it, man! what dodge air you up to now? *You* haint got religion, I hope?'

'I have,' gravely responded Stebbins.

'Hooraw! ha, ha, ha! Wall, what sort o' thing is it anyhow!'

'My religion is of the right sort, Brother Holt.'

'Methody?'

'Nothing of the kind.'

'What then? I thort they war all Methodies in Swampville?'

'They're all *Gentiles* in Swampville—worse than Infidels themselves.'

'Wal—I know they brag mightily on thar genteelity. I reckon you're about right thar—them storekeepers air stuck up enough for anythin'.'

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'No, no; it's not that I mean. My religion has nothing to do with Swampville. Thank the Lord for his mercy, I've been led into a surer way of salvation. I suppose, Brother Holt, you've heard of the new Revelation?'

'Heern o' the new rev'lation? Wal, I don't know as I hev. What's the name o't?'

'The book of *Mormon*.'

'Oh! Mormons! I've heern o' them. Haint they been a fightin' a spell up thar in Massouray or Illinoy, whar they built 'em a grandiferous temple? I heern some talk o' it.'

'At Nauvoo—it is even so, Brother Holt. The wicked Gentiles have been persecuting the Saints; just as their fathers were persecuted by the Egyptian Pharaohs.'

'An' haint they killed thar head man—Smith, he war called, if I reccolex right?'

'Alas, true! Joseph Smith has been made a martyr, and is now an angel in heaven. No doubt, he is now in glory, at the head of an angelic host.'

'Wal, if the angels air weemen, he'll hev a good wheen o' 'em I reckon. I've heern he war at the head o' a putty consid'able host o' 'em up thar in Massouray—fifty wives they said he hed! War that ere true, Josh?'

'Scandal, Brother Holt—all scandal of the wicked world! They were but wives *in the spirit*: that the Gentiles can't comprehend—since their eyes have not been opened by the Revelation.'

'Wal, it 'peers to be a tol'able free religion. Sort o' Turk, aint it?'

'Nothing of the kind. It has nothing in common with the doctrines of Mohammedanism.'

'But whar did *you* get it, Josh Stebbins? Who gin it to ye?'

'You remember the man I brought over here last fall?'

'Sartint I do. Young he war—Brig Young, I think, you called him?'

'The same.'

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'In coorse, I remember him well enough: but I reckon our Mar do a leetle better. He tried to spark the girl, and made fine speeches to her: but she couldn't bar the sight o' him for all that. Ha, ha, ha! Don't ye reccolex the trick that ar minks played on him? She unbuckled the girt o' his saddle, just as he war agoin' to mount, and down he kim—saddle, bags an' all—cawollop to the airth! ha! ha! Arter he war gone I larfed till I war like to bust.'

'You did wrong, Hickman Holt, to encourage your daughter in her sauciness. Had you known the man—*that man, sir, was a prophet!*'

'A prophet!'

'Yes—the greatest perhaps the world ever saw—a man in direct communication with the Almighty himself.'

'Lord! 'Twant Joe Smith, war it?'

'No; but one as great as he—one who has inherited his spirit; and who is now the head of the Saints.'

'That fellur at tha head? You 'stonish me, Josh Stebbins.'

'Ah! well you may be astonished; he has astonished me, Hickman Holt. He has turned me from evil ways, and led me to fear the Lord.'

The squatter looked incredulous, but remained silent.

'Yes, that same man, who was here with me in your humble cabin, is now Chief Priest of the Mormon Church! He has laid his hands on this poor head, and constituted me one of his humble Apostles.'

'Aypostles?'

'Yes, one of the *Twelve* intrusted with spreading the true faith of the saints over all the world.'

'Hooraw for you, Josh Stebbins! You'll be jest the man for that sort o' thing; yev got the larnin' for it, haint you?'

'No doubt, Brother Holt, with the help of God my humble acquirements will be useful; for though *He* only can open for us poor sinners the kingdom of Grace, yet he suffers such weak instruments as myself, to point out the narrow path that leads to

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it. Just as with the Philistines of old, the hearts of the Gentiles are hardened like flint stones, and refuse to receive the true faith. Unlike the followers of Mohammed, *we* propagate not by the sword, but by the influence of ratiocination.'

'What?'

'Ratiocination.'

'What the durnation's that?'

'Reason—reason.'

'Oh! common sense you mean, I s'pose?'

'Exactly so—reasoning that produces conviction: and, I flatter myself, that, being gifted with some little skill, my efforts, with the help of the Lord, may be crowned with success.'

'Wall, Josh, 'ithout talkin' o' common sense, yev got a good grist o' lawyer's sense—that I know; an' so, I s'pose, you've tuk it in your head to make beginnin' on me. Aint that why yev come over this mornin'?'

'What?'

'To make a Mormon o' me?'

Up to this time the conversation had been carried on in a somewhat stiff and irrelevant manner: this more especially on the side of the squatter, who—notwithstanding his endeavours to assume an air of easy nonchalance—was evidently labouring under suspicion and constraint. From the fact of Stebbins having sent a message to forewarn him of his visit, he knew that the schoolmaster had some business with him, of more than usual importance; and it was with a view to ascertain the nature of this business, and relieve himself from suspense, that the interrogatory was put. He would have been right glad to have received an answer in the affirmative—since it would have been no trouble to him to turn Mormon, or profess to do so; and for a moment he half indulged in the hope, that this might be the errand on which Stebbins had come—as was evinced by a more cheerful expression on his countenance.

As the saint, however, lingered long before making reply, the

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shadows of suspicion again darkened over the brow of the squatter; and with a nervous uneasiness, he awaited the answer.

'It'll be a tough job, Josh,' said he, with an effort to appear unconcerned—'a tough job, mind ye.'

'Well, so I should expect,' answered the apostle drily; 'and, just for that reason, I don't intend to try it: though I should like, Brother Holt, to see you gathered into the fold. I know our great High Priest would make much of a man like *you*. The saints have many enemies, and need strong arms and stout hearts such as yours, Hickman Holt. The Lord has given to his Prophet the right to defend the true faith—even with carnal weapons, if others fail; and woe be to them who make war on us! Let them dread the *Destroying Angels*.'

'The Destroyin' Angels! What sort o' critters be they?'

'They are the *Danites*.'

'Wal, I'm just as wise as ever, Josh. Dod rot it, man! don't be mystiferous. Who air the Danites, I shed like to know?'

'You can only know them by initiation, and you *should* know them; you're just the man to be one of them; and I have no doubt you'd be made one, as soon as you joined us.'

The apostle paused, as if to note the effect of his words; but the colossal hunter appeared as if he had not heard them. It was not from impassibility, but rather because he was not heeding them—his mind being occupied with a presentiment of some more unpleasant proposal on the part of his visitor. He remained silent, however: leaving it to the latter to proceed to the ultimate declaration of his design.

The suspicions of the squatter—if directed to anything connected with his family affairs—were well grounded, and soon received confirmation. After a pause, the Mormon continued:

'No, Hickman Holt, it aint with *you* my business lies to-day—that is, not exactly with you.'

'Who then?'

'*Your daughter*.'

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CHAPTER VII

THE MORMON'S DEMAND.

A SHUDDER passed through the herculean frame of the hunter —though it was scarcely perceptible, from the effort he made to conceal it. It was noticed for all that; and the emotion that caused it, perfectly understood. The keen eye of the *ci-devant* law-clerk was too skilled, in reading the countenance, to be deceived by an effort at impassibility.

'My daughter?' muttered Holt, half interrogatively.

'Your daughter,' echoed the Mormon, with imperturbable coolness.

'But which o' 'em? Thar air two.'

'Oh! you know which I mean—Marian, of course.'

'An' what do ye want wi' Marian, Josh?'

'Come, Brother Holt, it's no use your feigning ignorance I've spoken to you of this before: you know well enough what I want.'

'Cuss me if I do! I remember what you sayed afore; but I thort you war only jokin.'

'I was in earnest then, Hickman Holt, and I'm still more in earnest now. I want a wife, and I think Marian would suit me admirably. I suppose you know that the Saints have moved off from Illinois and are now located beyond the Rocky Mountains?'

'I've heern somethin' o't.'

'Well, I propose going there to join them; and I must take a wife with me: for no man is welcome who comes there without one.'

'Y—e—es,' drawled the squatter, with a bitter smile; 'an

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from what I've heern, I reckon he'd be more welkum if he fetched half-a-dozen.'

'Nonsense, Hickman Holt. I wonder a man of your sense would listen to such lies. It's a scandal that's been scattered abroad, by a set of corrupt priests and Methody preachers; who are jealous of us because we are drawing their people. Sheer, wicked lies, every word of it!'

'Wal, I don't know about that. But I know one thing to a martinty—you'll niver git Marian's consent.'

'I don't want Marian's consent—that don't signify, so long as I have yours.'

'Mine?'

'Ay, yours; and I must have it. Look here, Hickman Holt! Listen to me! We're making too long a talk about this business; and I have no time to waste in words. I have made everything ready, and shall leave for the Salt Lake, before three more days have passed over my head. The caravan I'm going with is to start from Fort Smith on the Arkansas; and it'll be ready, by the time I get there, to move over the plains. I've bought me a team and wagon; it's already loaded and packed: and there's a corner in it, left expressly for your daughter: therefore, she must go.'

The tone of the speaker had suddenly changed, from that of saintly insinuation, to bold, open menace. The squatter, notwithstanding his fierce and formidable aspect, did not dare to reply in the same strain: he was evidently cowed, and suffering under some fearful apprehension.

'*Must* go?' he muttered, half involuntarily, as if echoing the other's words.

'Yes, *must* and *shall*.'

'I tell you, Josh Stebbins, she'll niver consent.'

'And I tell you, Hickman Holt, that I don't want her consent; that I leave you to obtain; and if you can't get it otherwise, you must *force* it. Bah! what is it for? A good husband, a

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good home—plenty of meat, drink, and dress: for don't you get it into your fancy that the Latter-Day Saints resemble your canting hypocrites of other creeds, who think they please God with their miserable penances. Quite the reverse, I can assure you. We mean to live as God intended men should live—eat, drink, and be merry. Look there!'

The speaker exhibited a handful of shining gold pieces.

'That's the way our Church provides for her Apostles. Your daughter will be a thousand times better off there, than in this wretched hovel. Perhaps *she* will not mind the change, so much as *you* appear to think. I know many a first class girl that would be glad o' the chance.'

'I know *she* won't give in—far less to be made a Mormon o'. I've heern her speak agin 'em.'

'I say again she must give in. After all, you needn't tell her I'm Mormon; she needn't know anything about that. Let her think I'm only moving out west to Oregon—where there are plenty of respectable emigrants now going. She'll not suspect anything in that. Once out at Salt Lake, she'll soon get reconciled to Mormon life, I guess.'

The squatter remained silent for some moments: his head hanging forward over his broad breast, his eyes turned inward—as if searching within his bosom for some thought to guide and direct him. In there, no doubt, a terrible struggle was going on—a tumult of mixed, emotions. He loves his daughter, and would leave her to her own will; but he fears this saintly suitor, and dares not gainsay him. It must be some dread secret, or fiendish scheme, that enables this small, insignificant man to sway the will of such a giant!

A considerable time passed, and still the squatter vouchsafed no answer: he was evidently wavering, as to the nature of the response he should make. Twice or thrice he raised his head stealthily, directing his glance to the countenance of his visitor; but only to read, in the looks of the latter, a fixed and implacable purpose. There was no mercy there.

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All at once, a change came over the colossus—a resolution of resistance—as evinced by his altered attitude, and the changed expression of his face. The triumphant glances of the pseudo-saint appeared to have provoked him more than the matter in dispute. Like the buffalo of the plains stung with Indian arrows, or the great *mysticetus* of the deep goaded by the harpoon of the whaler, all the angry energies of his nature appeared suddenly aroused from their lethargy; and he sprang to his feet, towering erect in the presence of his tormentor.

'D———n!' cried he, striking the floor with his heavy heel. 'she won't do it—she won't, and she *shan't*.'

'Keep cool, Hickman Holt,' rejoined the Mormon, without moving from his seat, 'keep cool! I expected this; but it's all bluster. I tell you she will, and she *shall*.'

'Hev a care, Josh Stebbins! Hev a care what yur about! Ye don't know what you may drive me to'——

'But I know where I may *lead* you to,' interrupted the other, with a sneering smile.

'What?' involuntarily inquired Holt.

'The gallows,' laconically answered Stebbins.

'H—l and d———n!'

This awful rejoinder was accompanied with a furious grinding of teeth, but with a certain recoiling—as if the angry spirit of the giant could still be stayed by such a menace.

'It's no use swearing about it, Holt,' continued the Mormon, after a certain time had passed in silence. *My* mind's made up—the girl must go with me. Say *yes* or *no*. If yes, then all's well—well for your daughter, and well for you too. I shall be out of your way—Salt Lake's a long distance off—and it's *not likely you'll ever set eyes on me again*. You understand me?'

The saint pronounced these last words with a significant emphasis; and then paused, as if to let them have their full weight

They appeared to produce an effect. On hearing them, a gleam like a sudden flash of sunlight, passed over the countenance of

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the squatter It appeared the outward index of some consolatory thought freshly conceived : and its continuance proved, that it was influencing him to take a different view of the Mormon's proposal.

He spoke at length ; but no longer in the tone of rage—for his passion seemed to have subsided, as speedily as it had sprung up.

'An' s'pose I say *no* ?'

'Why, in that case, I shall not start so soon as I had intended. I shall stay in the settlements till I have performed a duty that for a long time I have left undone.'

'What duty is't you mean ?'

'One I owe to society ; and which I have perhaps sinfully neglected—*bring a murderer to justice !*'

'Hush ? Josh Stebbins—for God's sake speak low ! *You know it isn't true*—but hush ! The girls are 'ithout. Don't let them hear such talk !'

'Perhaps,' continued Stebbins without heeding the interruption, 'perhaps that murderer fancies he might escape. He is mistaken if he do. One word from me in Swampville, and the hounds of the law would be upon him ; ay, and if he could even get clear of *them*, he could not escape out of *my* power. I have told you I am an Apostle of the great Mormon Church ; and that man would be cunning indeed who could shun the vengeance of our Destroying Angels. Now, Hickman Holt, which is it to be? yes or no ?'

The pause was ominous for poor Marian. The answer decided her doom. It was delivered in a hoarse, husky voice.

'*Yes—yes—she may go.*'

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CHAPTER VIII.

A SPLENDID PENSION.

The treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was followed by an excessive *débandement* which sent many thousands of sabres ringing back into their scabbards—some of them soon after to spring forth in the cause of freedom, calumniously called 'filibustering;' others perhaps destined never to be drawn again. Using a figurative expression, not a few were converted into spades; and in this *pacific* fashion, carried to the far shores of the Pacific Ocean—there to delve for Californian gold; while still others were suspended in the counting-house or the studio, to rust in inglorious idleness.

A three years' campaign under the sultry skies of Mexico—drawing out the war-fever that had long burned in the bosoms of the American youth—had satisfied the ambition of most. It was only those who arrived late upon the field—too late to pluck a laurel—who would have prolonged the strife.

The narrator of this tale, Edward Warfield—*ci-devant* captain of a corps of 'rangers'—was not one of the last mentioned. With myself, as with many others, the great Mexican campaign was but the continuation of the little war—*la petite guerre*—that had long held an intermittent existence upon the borders of Texas, and in which we had borne part: and the provincial laurels there reaped, when interwoven with the fresher and greener bays gathered upon the battle-fields of Anahuac, constituted a wreath exuberant enough to content us for the time.

For my part, notwithstanding the portentous sound of my an-

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cestral patronymic, I was tired of the toils of war, and really desired a 'spell' of peace: during which I might indulge in the *dolce far niente*, and obtain for my wearied spirit a respite of repose. My wishes were in similitude with those of the poet, who longed for 'a lodge in some vast wilderness—some boundless contiguity of shade;' or, perhaps, more akin to those of that other poet of less solitary inclinings, who only desired the 'desert as a dwelling-place, with one fair spirit for his minister!'

In truth, I felt a strong inclination for the latter description of life; and, in all likelihood, would have made a trial of it, but for the interference of one of those ill-starred contingencies, that often embarrass the best intentions. A phrase of common occurence will explain the circumstance that offered opposition to my will: 'want of the means to support a wife.'

I had been long enough in the wilderness, to know that even a 'dwelling in the desert' cannot be maintained without expense; and that, however pure the desert air, the *fairest* 'spirit' would require something more substantial to live upon.

Under this prudential view of the case, marriage was altogether out of the question. We, the *débandés*, were dismissed without pension: the only reward for our warlike achievements being a piece of 'land scrip,' good for the number of acres on the face of it—to be selected from 'government land,' wherever the holder might choose to 'locate.'

The scrip was of greater or less amount, according to the term of the receiver's service. Mine represented a 'section' of 640 acres—worth in ordinary times a dollar and quarter per acre; but just then, on account of the market being flooded by such material, reduced to less than half its value.

With this magnificent 'bounty' was I rewarded for services that perhaps—some day—might be—never mind!—thank heaven! for blessing me with the comforting virtues of humility and contentment!

This bit of scrip then—a tried steed that had carried me many

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a long mile, and through the smoke of more than one red fray—a true rifle that I had myself carried equally as far—a pair of Colt's pistols—and a steel 'Toledo,' taken at the storming of Chapultepec—constituted the bulk of my available property. Add to this a remnant of my last month's pay—in truth not enough to provide me with that much coveted article, a *civilian's suit:* in proof of which, my old undress frock, with its yellow spread-eagle buttons, clung to my shoulders like a second shirt of Nessus. The vanity of wearing a uniform, that may have once been felt, was long ago threadbare as the coat itself; and yet I was not wanting in friends who fancied that it might still exist! How little understood they the real state of the case, and how much did they misconstrue my involuntary motives!

It was just to escape from such unpleasant associations, that I held on to my 'scrip.' Most of my brother officers had sold theirs for a 'song,' and spent the proceeds on a 'supper.' I had other views in relation to mine, than parting with it to the greedy speculators. It promised me that very wilderness-home I was in search of; and, having no prospect of procuring a fair spirit for my 'minister,' I determined to 'locate' it alone.

I was at the time staying in Tennessee—the guest of a campaigning comrade and still older friend. He was the grandson of that gallant leader, who, with a small band of only forty families, ventured three hundred miles through the heart of the 'bloody ground,' and founded Nashville upon the bold bluffs of an almost unknown river! From the lips of their descendants I had heard many thrilling tales of adventures, experienced by this pioneer band, until Tennessee had become, in my fancy, a region of romance. Other associations had led me to love this hospitable and chivalric state; and I resolved that within its boundaries I would make my home.

A visit to the Land-office of Nashville ended in my selection of Section No 9, Township ——, as my future 'plantation.' It was represented to me as a fertile spot—situated in the 'West

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in Reserve'—near the banks of the beautiful Obion, and not far above the confluence of this river with the Mississippi.

The agent believed there had been some 'improvement' made upon the land, by a *squatter*, but whether the squatter still lived upon it, he could not tell. 'At all events the fellow will be too poor to exercise the *pre-emption right*, and of course must move off.'

This would answer admirably. Although my Texan experience had constituted me a tolerable woodsman, it had not made me a wood-cutter: and the clearing of the squatter, however small it might be, would serve as a beginning.

I congratulated myself on my good luck; and without further parley, parted with my scrip—receiving in return the necessary documents, that constituted me legal owner and lord of the soil of Section 9.

The only additional information the land-agent could afford me was, that my new purchase was all 'heavily timbered,' with the exception before referred to—that the township in which it was situated was called Swampville; and that the section itself was known as 'Hole's Clearing'—from the name, it was supposed, of the squatter who had made the 'improvement.'

With this intelligence in my head, and the title-deeds in my pocket, I took leave of the friendly official; who, at parting, politely wished me 'a pleasant time of it on my new plantation.'

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CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDLY ADVICE.

On returning to the house of my friend, I informed him of my purchase; and was pleased to find that he approved of it.

'You can't be taken in,' said he, 'by land upon the Obion! from what I have heard of it, it is one of the most fertile spots in Tennessee. Moreover, as you are fond of hunting, you'll find game in abundance. The black bear, and even the panther—or "painter," as our backwoodsmen have it—are still common in the Obion bottom; and, indeed, all throughout the forests of the Reserve.'

'I am rejoiced to hear it.'

'No doubt, continued my friend, with a smile, you may shoot deer from your own door; or trap wolves and wild cats at the entrance to your hen-roost.'

'Good!'

'O yes—though I can't promise that you will see anything of *Venus* in the woods, you may enjoy to your heart's content the noble art of *venerie*. The Obion bottom is a very paradise for hunters. It was it that gave birth to the celebrated Crockett.'

'On that account it will be all the more interesting to me; and, from what you say, it is just the sort of place I should have chosen to *squat* upon.'

'By the by,' interrupted my friend, looking a little grave as he spoke, 'your making use of that familiar phrase recalls the circumstance you mentioned just now. Did I understand you to say, there was a *squatter* on the land?'

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'There *was* one—so the agent has told me: but whether he still *squatted* there, the official could not say.'

'Rather awkward, if he be,' rejoined my friend, in a sort of musing soliloquy; while, with his eyes fixed upon the ground, he kept pulling his goatee to its full length.

'How awkward?' I asked in some surprise, 'What can *that* signify?'

'A great deal. These squatters are queer fellows—awkward customers to deal with—especially when you come to turn them out of their house and home, as they consider it. It is true, they have the *pre-emption right*—that is, they may purchase, if they please, and send you to seek a location elsewhere; but this is a privilege those gentry rarely please to indulge in—being universally too poor to purchase.'

'What then?'

'Their motto is, for "him to keep who can." The old adage of "possession being nine points of the law," is, in the squatter's code, no dead letter, I can assure you.'

Do you mean that the fellow might refuse to turn out?'

'It depends a good deal on what sort of a fellow he is. They are not all alike. If he should chance to be one of the obstinate and pugnacious kind, you are likely enough to have trouble with him.'

'But surely the law'——

'Will aid you in ousting him—that's what you were going to say?'

'I should expect so—in Tennessee at all events.'

'And you would be disappointed. In almost any other part of the State, you *might* rely upon legal assistance; but, I fear that about Swampville you will find society not very different from that encountered on the borders of Texas; and you know how little help the law could afford you there, in the enforcement of such a claim.'

'Then I must take the law into my own hands,' rejoined I, fall

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ing into very old-fashioned phraseology—for I was beginning to feel indignant at the very idea of this prospective difficulty.

'No, Warfield,' replied my sober friend, 'do not take that course I know you are not the man to be *scared* out of your rights; but, in the present case, prudence is the proper course to follow. Your squatter, if there be one—it is to be hoped that, like many of our grand cities, he has only an existence on the map—but if there should be a real live animal of this description on the ground, he will be almost certain to have neighbors—some half-dozen of his own kidney—living at greater or less distances around him. They are not usually of a clannish disposition; but in a matter of this kind they will be as unanimous in their sympathies, and antipathies too, as they would about the butchering of a bear. Turn one of them out by force,—either legal or otherwise—and it would be like waking up a hornet's nest about your ears. Even were you to succeed in so clearing your land, you would find ever afterward a set of very unpleasant neighbours to live among. I know some cases in point, that occurred nearer home here; in fact, on some wild lands of my own I had an instance of the kind.'

'What, then, am I to do? Can you advise me?'

'Act as others have often acted before you, and who have actually been forced to it. *Should there be a squatter*, and one likely to prove obstinate, approach him as gently as you can, and state your case frankly. You will find this the best mode of treating with these fellows—many of whom have a dash of honour as well as honesty in their composition. Speak of the improvement he has made, and offer him a recompense.'

'Ah! friend Blount,' replied I, addressing my kind host by his baptismal name, 'it is much easier to listen to your advice than to follow it.'

'Come, old comrade,' rejoined he, after a momentary pause, 'I think I understand you. There need be no concealment between friends, such as we are. Let not that difficulty hinder you from

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following the course I have recommended. The old general's property is not all gone yet; and, should you stand in need of a hundred or two, to make a *second* purchase of your plantation, send me word, and'——

'Thanks, Blount—thanks! it is just as I should have expected; but I shall not become your debtor for such a purpose. I have been a frontiersman too long to be bullied by a backwoodsman'——

'There now, Warfield! just your own passionate self! Nay, you must take my advice. Pray do not go rashly about it, but act as I have counselled you.'

'That will depend upon contingencies. Should Master Holt—for I believe that is my predecessor's name—should he prove *amiable*, I may go a little in your debt, and pay him for whatever log-chopping he has done. If otherwise, by the Lady of Guadalupe!—you remember our old Mexican shibboleth—he shall be cleared out of his clearing *sans façon*. Perhaps we have been wasting words upon an ideal existence! Perhaps there is no squatter after all; or that old Holt has long since gone under, and only his ghost will be found flitting around the precincts of this disputed territory. Would not that be an interesting companion for my hours of midnight loneliness? A match for the wolves and wildcats! Ha, ha, ha!'

'Well, old comrade; I trust it may turn out no worse. The ghost of a squatter might prove a less unpleasant neighbor than the squatter himself, dispossessed of his *squatment*; but, notwithstanding this badinage, I know you will act with judgment; and you can count upon my help if you should require it.'

I grasped the speaker's hand, to express my gratitude; and the tight pressure returned, told me I was parting with one of the few friends I had in the world.

My *impedimenta* had been already packed: they did not need much stowage. A pair of saddle-bags was sufficient to contain all my personal property, including the title-deeds of my freehold!

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I carried upon my person; my sword only being strapped along the saddle.

In another moment I was mounted, and heading my horse toward the *Western Reserve.*

CHAPTER X.

A CLASSIC LAND.

BETWEEN Nashville and Swampville extends a distance of more than a hundred miles—just three days' travel on horseback. For the first ten miles—to Harpeth River—I found an excellent road graded and macadamised, running for most part between fenced plantations. My next point was *Paris;* and forty miles further on, I arrived in *Dresden!*

So far as the nomenclature was concerned, I might have fancied myself travelling upon the continent of Europe. By going a little to the right, I might have entered Asia—for I was told of *Smyrna* and *Troy* being at no great distance in that direction; by proceeding in a south-westerly course, I should have passed through *Denmark,* and landed at *Memphis*—certainly an extensive tour within the short space of three days!

Ugh! those ugly names! What hedge-schoolmaster has scattered them so loosely and profusely over this lovely land? Whip the wretch with rattlesnakes! Memphis indeed!—as if Memphis with its monolithic statues needed commemoration or the banks of the Mississippi! A new Osiris, a new Sphinx, 'half horse, half alligator, with a sprinkling of the snapping-turtle' At every forking of the roads, whenever I inquired my way, in my ears rang those classic homonymes, till my soul was sick of the sounds. Swampville was euphony, and 'Mud Creek' *soft* music in comparison!

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Beyond Dresden, the titles became more appropriate, and much more rare. There were long stretches having no names at all; for the simple reason that there were no *places* to bear them. The numerous creeks, however, had been baptised, and evidently by the backwoodsman himself, as their titles indicated. 'Deer Creek,' and 'Mud,' 'Coon' and 'Cat,' 'Big' and 'Little Forky,' told that the pioneers who first explored the hydrographic system of the Western Reserve, were not heavily loaded with classic lore; and a pity it is that pedantry should be permitted to alter the simple, but expressive and appropriate, appellatives by them bestowed. Unfortunately, the system is followed up to this hour by the Fremonts, and other pseudo-explorers of the farthest west. The soft and harmonious sound of Indian and Spanish nomenclature, as well as the more striking titles bestowed by the trappers, are rapidly being obliterated from the maps; and their places to be supplied—at the instigation of a fulsome flattery—by the often vulgar names of demagogic leaders, or the influential heads of the employing *bureau*.

'I know the old general will be pleased—perhaps reciprocate the compliment in his next dispatch—if I call this beautiful river "Smith."—How the secretary will smile, when he sees his name immortalised upon my map, by a lake never to be dried up, and which hereafter is to be known by the elegant and appropriate appellation of "Jones!"'

Under just such influence are these absurd titles bestowed; and the consequence is, that among the romantic defiles of the Rocky Mountains we have our ears jarred by a jumble of petty and most inappropriate names—Smiths, Joneses, Jameses, and the like—while, from the sublime peaks of the Cascade range, we have 'Adams,' 'Jackson,' 'Jefferson,' 'Madison,' and 'Washington,' overlooking the limitless waters of the Pacific.

This series we could excuse. The possession of high qualities, or the achievement of great deeds, ennobles even a common name; and all these have been stamped with the true patent. In the

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associated thoughts that cling around them, we take no note of the sound, whether it be harsh or harmonious; but that is another question, and must not hinder us from entering our protest against the nomenclature of Smith, Jones, and Robinson! . . . .

Beyond Dresden, my road could no longer be termed a road; it was a mere trace or lane, cut out in the forest; with here and there a tree 'blazed,' to indicate the direction.

As I neared the point of my destination, I became naturally curious to learn something about it—that is, about Swampville—since it was evident that this was to be the *point d'appui* of my future efforts at colonisation—my dépôt and port of entry. I should have inquired, had I found any one to inquire *from;* but for ten miles along the road, I encountered not a living creature. Then only a negro, with an ox-cart loaded with wood; and despairing of information from such a source, I declined detaining him. The only intelligence I was able to draw from the negro was that; 'da "city" o' Swam'ville he lay about ten mile furrer down da crik.'

The 'ten mile down da crik' proved to be long ones; but throughout the whole distance I saw not a soul, until I had arrived within a mile or so of the 'settlement.'

I had been already apprised that Swampville was a new place. Its fame had not yet reached the eastern world; and even in Nashville was it unknown—except perhaps to the Land-office. It was only after entering the Reserve, that I became fully assured of its existence, and there it was known as a 'settlement rather than a 'city.'

For all that, Swampville proved to be not so contemptible a place; and the reason I encountered so little traffic, while approaching it, was that I had been coming in the *wrong direction*—in other words, I had approached it *from behind.*

Swampville was in reality a *riverine* town. To it the east was a *back* country; and its front face was to the west. In that direction lay its world and the ways that opened to it.

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Log shanties began to line the road—standing thicker as I advanced; while, at intervals, appeared a 'frame-house' of more pretentious architecture.

In front of one of these—the largest of the collection—there stood a tall post, or rather a tree with its top cut off, and divested of its lower branches. On the head of this was a 'martin-box;' and underneath the dwelling of the birds, a broad framed board, on which was legible the word 'Hotel.' A portrait of Jackson, done in 'continental uniform,' embellished the face of the board; though the sign seemed little appropriate, for in the harsh features of 'Old Hickory' there was but slight promise of hospitality.

It was no use going farther—the 'Jackson Hotel' was evidently the 'head inn' of the place; and without pause or parley I dismounted at the door.

I was too well used to western habits to wait either for welcome or assistance—too careful of my Arab to trust him to hands unskilled—and I did the unsaddling for myself. A half-naked negro gave me some slight help in the 'grooming' process—all the while exhibiting his ivories and the whites of his eyes in an expression of ill-concealed astonishment, produced apparently by the presence of my uniform coat—to the 'darkey,' no doubt, an odd apparition.

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CHAPTER XI.

THE 'JACKSON HOTEL.'

I found that I had arrived in the very 'nick of time,' for just as I returned from the stable, and was entering the verandah of the hotel, I heard the bell calling its guests to supper. There was no ado made about me: neither landlord nor waiter met me with a word; and, following the stream of 'boarders' or travellers who had arrived before me, I took my seat at the common *table d'hôte*.

Had the scene been new to me, I might have found food for reflection, or observed circumstances to astonish me. But I had been long accustomed to mix in as motley a throng, as that which now surrounded the table of the Swampville hotel. A supper-table, encircled by blanket and 'jeans' coats—by buckskin hunting and red-flannel shirts—by men without coats at all—was nothing new to me, nor was it strange to find these *bizarre* costumes interspersed among others of fashionable cut and finest cloth. Black broad-cloth frocks, and satin or velvet vests, were quite common; and individuals thus attired formed a majority of the guests—for in young settlements the 'hotel' or 'tavern' is also a boarding-house, where the 'store-keepers' and the better class of clerks take their meals—usually sleeping in the office or store. In glancing around the table, I saw many old 'types,' though not one face that I had ever seen before.

There was one, however, that soon attracted my attention, and fixed it. It was *not* a lady's face, as you may be imagining; though there were present some of that sex—the landlord's help

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mate, who poured out the coffee, with some three or four younger specimens of the backwoods fair—her daughters and nieces. All, however, were absolutely without attraction of any sort: and I somewhat bitterly remembered the *mot* of double meaning, with which my friend had entertained me at parting.

Venus was certainly not visible at the Swampville *table d' hôte*. for the presiding divinity was a perfect Hecate, and her attendant damsels could have found no place in the train of the Cytherean goddess.

No—the face that interested me was neither that of a female, nor in any way feminine. It was the face of a *man;* and that in the most emphatic sense of the word.

He was a young man—apparently about four or five and twenty—and costumed as a backwoods hunter; that is, he wore a buckskin hunting-shirt, leggins, and moccasins, with bullet-pouch and powder-horn suspended over his shoulder, and hunting-knife sheathed in his belt. The coonskin cap, hanging against the adjacent wall, was his head-dress: I had seen him place it there, before taking his seat at the supper-table.

With the personal appearance of this young man the eye was at once satisfied. A figure of correct contour, features of noble outline, a face expressive of fine mental qualities—were the more salient characteristics that struck me at the first glance. Regarding the portrait more particularly, other details became manifest: round hazel eyes, with well devoloped lashes: brows finely arched: a magnificent shock of nut-brown curling hair; a small, well formed month, with white, regular teeth—all contributed to the creation of what might be termed a type of manly beauty.

This beauty appeared in a somewhat neglected garb. Art might have improved it; but it was evident that none had been employed, or even thought of. It was a clear case of 'beauty unadorned;' and the possessor of it appeared altogether unconscious of its existence. I need not add that this mental cha-

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racteristic, on the part of the young man, heightened the grace of his personal charms.

Why this young fellow fixed my attention, I can scarcely tell. His costume was by no means uncommon; though it was the only one of the kind there present. It was not that, however; nor yet his fine personal appearance, that interested me; but rather something I had observed in his bearing and manner. As we were seated opposite each other, near the foot of the long table, I had an excellent opportunity of observing him.

Notwithstanding his undoubted good looks—sufficiently striking to have filled the possessor with vanity—his deportment was marked by a modest reserve, that proved him either unaware of his personal advantages, or without any conceit in them. By the glances occasionally cast towards him, from the opposite end of the table, I could perceive that 'Miss Alvina' and 'Miss Caroline' were not insensible to their attractions. Neither, however, had reason to congratulate herself upon any reciprocity; the young man either did not observe their favouring glances, or, at all events, took no notice of them; the melancholy tinge pervading his features remaining altogether unaltered.

Equally impassible did he appear under the jealous looks of some three or four smart young storekeepers, influenced, no doubt, by tender relations existing between them and the aforementioned damsels, whose sly *espièglerie* of the handsome hunter could not escape their observation.

The young man appeared to be rather *friendless*, than unknown. I could perceive that almost all of the company were acquainted with him; but that most of them—especially the gentlemen in broad-cloth—affected an air of superiority over him. No one talked much to him: for his reserved manner did not invite conversation; but when one of these did address a few words to him, it was in the style usually adopted by the well-to-do citizen, when holding converse with his less affluent neighbour. The young fellow was evidently not one to be sneered at

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or insulted; but, for all that, I could perceive that the broad cloth gentry did not quite regard him as an equal.

Perhaps this might be explained by the hypothesis that he was *poor;* and, indeed, it did not require much penetration to perceive, that such was the reality. The hunting-shirt, though once a handsome one, was no longer new. On the contrary, it was considerably 'scuffed;' and the green baize wrappers upon his limbs were faded to a greenish brown. Other points proclaimed a light purse, perhaps far lighter than the heart of him who carried it, if I was to judge by the expression of his features.

Notwithstanding all this, the young man was evidently an object of interest—whether friendly or hostile—and might have been the *cynosure* of the supper-table, but for my undress frock and spread-eagle buttons. These, however, claimed some share of the curiosity of Swampville; and I was conscious of being the object of a portion of its surveillance. I knew not what ideas they could have had about me, and cared as little; but, judging from the looks of the men—the broad-cloth gentlemen in particular—I was impressed with a suspicion that I was neither admired, nor welcome.

In the eyes of your 'sovereign citizen,' the mere military man is not the hero that he is elsewhere; and he must shew something more than a uniform coat, to recommend himself to their suffrages.

I was conceited enough to imagine that Miss Alvina, and her *vis-à-vis*, Miss Car'line, did not look so unfriendly; but the handsome face and magnificent curls of the young hunter were beside me; and it was no use taking the field against such a rival. I was not jealous of him, however; nor he of me. On the contrary, of all the men present, he appeared most inclined to be courteous to me—as was evinced by his once or twice pushing within my reach those delicate dishes, distributed at very long distances over the table.

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I felt an incipient friendship for this young man, which he appeared to reciprocate. He saw that I was a stranger; and, notwithstanding the pretentious fashion of my dress, perhaps he noticed my well-worn coat, and conjectured that I might be as poor and friendless as himself. If it was to this fancy I was indebted for his sympathies, he was not far astray.

CHAPTER XII.

COLONEL KIPP.

As soon as I had swallowed supper, I hastened to place myself *en rapport* with the landlord of the hostelry—whose name I had ascertained to be 'Kipp,' or '*Colonel* Kipp,' as his guests called him. Though I had no intention of proceeding farther that night, I was desirous of obtaining some information about the whereabouts of my new estate, with such other facts in relation to it, as might be collected in Swampville. The landlord would be the most likely person to give me the desired intelligence.

This distinguished individual I encountered soon after in the verandah—seated upon a raw-hide rocking chair, with his feet elevated some six inches above the level of his nose, and resting across the balustrade of the railing—beyond which his huge horse-skin boots protruded a full half yard into the street. But that I was already aware of it, I should have had some difficulty in reconciling the portentous title of 'colonel' with the exceedingly unmilitary looking personage before me—a tall lopsided tobacco-chewer, who, at short intervals of about half a minute each, projected the juice in copious squirts into the street, sending it clean over the toes of his boots.

When I first set eyes upon the colonel, he was in the centre

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of a circle of tooth-pickers, who had just issued from the supper room. These were falling off one by one; and perceiving this, I waited for an opportunity to speak to the colonel alone. This, after a short time, offered itself.

The dignified gentleman took not the slightest notice of me, as I approached; nor until I had got so near as to leave no doubt upon his mind that a conversation was intended. Then, edging slightly round, and drawing in the boots, he made a half-face towards me—still, however, keeping fast to his chair.

'The army, sir, I prezoom?' interrogatively began Mr Kipp

'No,' answered I, imitating his laconism of address.

'No!'

'I have been in the service. I have just left it.'

'Oh—ah! From Mexico, then, *I* prezoom?'

'Yes.'

'Business in Swampville?'

'Why, yes, Mr Kipp'——

'I am usually called kurnel here,' interrupted the backwoods *militario*, with a bland smile, as if half deprecating the title, and that it was forced upon him. 'Of course,' continued he, 'you, sir, bein' a strenger'——

'I beg your pardon, Colonel Kipp: I *am* a stranger to your *city*, and of course'——

'Don't signify a dump, sir,' interrupted he, rather good humouredly, in return for the show of deference I had made, as also, perhaps, for my politeness in having styled Swampville a 'city.'

'Business in Swampville, you say?'

'Yes,' I replied; and, seeing it upon his lips to inquire the nature of my business—which I did not wish to make known just then—I forestalled him by the inquiry; 'Do you chance to know such a place as Holt's Clearing?'

'Chance to know such a place as Holt's Clearin'?'

'Yes—Holt's Clearing.'

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'Wal, there *air* such a place.'

'Is it distant?'

'If you mean Hick Holt's Clearin', it's a leetle better's six miles from here. He squats on Mud Crik.'

'There's a squatter upon it, then?'

'On Holt's Clearin'? Wal, I shed raather say there *air squatter* on't, an' no mistake.'

'His name is Holt, is it not?'

'That same individooal.'

'Do you think I could procure a guide in Swampville—some one who can show me the way to Holt's Clearing?'

'Do I think so? Possible you might. D'ye see that ar case in the coon-cap?'

The speaker looked, rather than pointed, to the young fellow of the buckskin shirt; who, outside the verandah, was now standing by the side of a very sorry-looking steed.

I replied in the affirmative.

'Wal, I reckon he kin show you the way to Holt's Clearin'. He's another o' them Mud Crik squatters. He's just catchin' up his critter to go that way.'

This I hailed as a fortunate circumstance. If the young hunter lived near the clearing I was in search of, perhaps he could give me all the information I required; and his frank open countenance led me to believe he would not withhold it. It occurred to me, therefore, to make a slight change in my programme. It was yet *early*—for supper in the backwoods is what is elsewhere known as 'tea.' The sun was still an hour or so above the horizon. My horse had made but a light journey; and nine miles more would be nothing to him.

All at once, therefore, I altered my intention of sleeping at the hotel; and determined, if the young hunter would accept me as a travelling companion, to proceed on with him to Mud Creek. Whether I should find a bed there, never entered into my calculation. I had my great-sleeved cloak strapped upon

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the cantle of my saddle; and with that for a covering, and the saddle itself for a pillow, I had made shift on many a night, more tempestuous than that promised to be.

I was about turning away to speak to the young man, when I was recalled by an exclamation from the landlord.

'I guess,' said he, in a half-bantering way, 'you haint told me your business yet?'

'No,' I answered deferentially, 'I have not.'

'What on airth's taken' you out to Holt's Clearin'?'

'That, Mr Kipp—I beg pardon, *Colonel* Kipp—is a private matter.'

'Private and particular, eh?'

'Very.'

'Oh, then, I guess, you'd better keep it to yourself.'

'That is precisely my intention,' I rejoined turning on my heel and stepping out of the verandah.

The young hunter was just buckling the girth of his saddle As I approached him, I saw that he was smiling. He had overheard the concluding part of the conversation; and looked as if pleased at the way in which I had bantered the 'colonel;' who, as I afterwards learned from him, was the grand swaggerer of Swampville.

A word was sufficient. He at once acceded to my request, frankly, if not in the most elegant phraseology.

'I'll be pleased to show ye the way to Holt's Clarin'. My own road jest that way, within a squll's jump o't.'

'Thank you: I shall not keep you waiting,' said I; as I re-entered the hotel, to pay for my entertainment and give orders for the saddling of my horse.

It was evident that I had offended the landlord by my brusque behaviour. I learned this by the *amount* of my bill, as well as by the fact of being permitted to saddle for myself. Even the naked 'nigger, did not make his appearance near the stable.

Not much cared I. I had drawn the girth too often to be

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disconcerted by such petty annoyance; and, in five minutes after, I was in the saddle, and ready for the road.

Having joined my companion in the street, we rode off from the inhospitable *caravanserai* of the Jackson Hotel—leaving its landlord-colonel to chew his tobacco, and such reflections as my remarks had given rise to.

CHAPTER XIII.

THROUGH THE FOREST.

As we passed up the street, I was conscious of being the subject of Swampville speculation. Staring faces at the windows, and gaping groups around the doors, proved by their looks and gestures, that I was regarded as a rare spectacle. It could scarcely be my companion who was the object of this universal curiosity; a buckskin hunting-shirt was an everyday sight in Swampville—not so a well-mounted *militairy* man, armed, uniformed, and equipped. No doubt, my splendid Arab, *caracoling* as if he had not been out of the stable for a week, came in for a large share of the general admiration.

We were soon beyond its reach. Five minutes sufficed to carry us out of sight of the Swampvillians; for, in that short space of time, we had cleared the suburbs of the 'city,' and were riding under the shadows of an unbroken forest.

Its cold gloom gave instantaneous relief—shading us at one and the same time from the fiery sun, and the fire of vulgar speculation through which we had been passing. I at least enjoyed the change; and for some minutes we rode silently along, my guide going in advance.

This mode of progression was not voluntary, but a necessity, arising from the nature of the road; which was a mere 'trace

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or bridle-path *blazed* across the forest. No wheel had ever made its track in the soft deep mud, into which, at every step, our steeds sank far above the fetlocks; and, as there was not room for two riders abreast, I followed the injunction of my companion by keeping my horse's head 'at the tail o' his'n.'

In this fashion we progressed for a mile or more, through a tract of what is termed 'bottom-timber'—a forest of those gigantic water-loving trees, the sycamore and cottonwood. Their tall gray trunks rose along the path, standing thickly on each side, and sometimes in regular rows, like the columns of some grand temple. I felt a secret satisfaction in gazing upon these colossal forms, for my heart hailed them as the companions of my future solitude. At the same time, I could not help the reflection, that, if my new estate was thus heavily encumbered, the clearing of the squatter was not likely to be extended beyond whatever limits the axe of Mr. Holt had already assigned to it.

A little further on, the path began to ascend. We had passed out of the bottom lands; and were crossing a ridge, which forms the *divide* between Mud Creek and the Swampville River. The soil was now a dry gravel, with less signs of fertility, and covered with a pine forest. The trees were of slender growth; and at intervals their trunks stood far apart, giving us an opportunity to ride side by side. This was exactly what I wanted, as I was longing for a conversation with my new acquaintance.

Up to this time he had observed a profound silence, but, for all that, I fancied he was not disinclined to a little *causerie*. His reserve seemed to spring from a sense of modest delicacy—as if he did not desire to take the initiative. I relieved him from this embarrassment by opening the dialogue.

'What sort of a gentleman is this Mr. Holt?'

'Gentleman!'

'Yes—what sort of a *person* is he?'

'Oh, what sort o' person. Wal, stranger, he's what we, in these parts, call a rough customer.'

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Indeed?'

'Raypher, I shed say.'

'Is he what you call a poor man?'

'All that I reckon He hain't got nothin', as I knows on, 'cep tin' his old critter o' a hoss, an' his clarin' o' a couple o' acres or thereabout; besides, he only *squats* upon that.'

'He's only a squatter, then?'

'That's all, stranger; though I reckon he considers the clarin' as much his own, as I do my bit o' ground, that's been bought an' paid for.'

'Indeed?'

'Yes—I shedn't like to be the party that would buy it over his head.'

The speaker accompanied these words with a significant glance, which seemed to say, 'I wonder if that's *his* business here?'

'Has he any family?'

'Thar's one—a young critter o' a girl'——

'That all?' I asked, seeing that my companion hesitated, as if he had something more to say, but was backward about declaring it.

'No, stranger—thar war another girl—older than this 'un.'

'And she?'

'She—she's gone away.'

'Married, I suppose?'

'That's what nobody about here can tell—nor whar she's gon neyther.'

The tone in which the young fellow spoke had suddenly altered from gay to grave; and, by a glimpse of the moonlight, I could perceive that his countenance was shadowed and sombre. I could have but little doubt as to the cause of this transformation. It was to be found in the subject of our conversation—the absent daughter of the squatter.

From motives of delicacy, I refrained from pushing my inquir

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les farther; but, indeed, I should have been prevented from doing so; for, just at that moment, the road once more narrowed, and we were forced apart. By the eager urging of his horse into the dark path, I could perceive that the hunter was desirous of terminating a dialogue—to him, in all probability, suggestive of bitter memories.

For another half hour we rode on in silence—my companion apparently buried in a reverie of thought; myself speculating on the chances of an unpleasant encounter; which, from the hints I had just had, was now rather certain than probable. Instead of a welcome from the squatter, and a bed in a corner of his cabin, I had before my mind the prospect of a wordy war; and, perhaps afterwards, of spending my night in the woods.

Once or twice, I was on the point of proclaiming my errand, and asking the young hunter for advice as to how I should act; but as I had not yet learned whether he was friend or foe of my future hypothetical antagonist, I thought it more prudent to keep my secret to myself.

His voice again fell upon my ear, now in a more cheerful tone It was simply to say, that I 'might expect a better road—we were approaching a "gleed;" beyont that the trace was wider an' we might ride thegither again.'

We were just entering the glade, as he finished speaking—an opening in the woods of limited extent. The contrast between it, and the dark forest path we had traversed was striking—as the change itself was pleasant. It was like emerging suddenly from darkness to daylight; for the full moon, now soaring high above the spray of the forest, filled the glade with the ample effulgence of her light. The dew-besprinkled flowers were sparkling like gems; and, even though it was night, their exquisite aroma had reached us afar off in the forest. There was not a breath of air stirring; and the unruffled leaves presented the sheen of shining metal. Under the clear moonlight, I could distinguish the varied hues of the frondage—that of the red maple from the

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scarlet sumacs and sassafras laurels; and these again, from the dark green of the Carolina bay-trees, and the soft, silvery foliage of the *Magnolia glauca*.

Even before entering the glade, this magnificent panorama had burst upon my sight—from a little embayment that formed the *debouchure* of the path; and I had drawn bridle, in order for a moment to enjoy its contemplation. The young hunter was still the length of his horse in advance of me; and I was about requesting him to do the same; but before I could give utterance to the words, I saw him make halt for himself. This, however, was done in so strange and hurried a manner, as at once to turn me from gazing upon the scene, and fix my eyes upon my companion.

As if by an involuntary effort, he had pulled his horse almost upon his haunches: and was now stiffly seated in the saddle, with blanched cheeks and eyes sparkling in their sockets—as if some object of terror was before him!

I did not ask for an explanation; I knew that the object that so strangely affected him was visible—though not from the point where I had halted. A touch of the spur brought my horse alongside him, and gave me a view of the whole surface of the glade.

I looked in the direction indicated by the attitude of the hunter, for—apparently paralysed by some terrible surprise—he had neither pointed nor spoken.

A little to the right of the path, I beheld a white object lying along the ground—a dead tree, whose barkless trunk and smooth naked branches gleamed under the moonlight with the whiteness of a blanched skeleton. In front of this, and a pace or two from it, was a dark form, upright and human-like. Favoured by the clear light of the moon, I had no difficulty in distinguishing this as the form of a woman.

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CHAPTER XIV.

SU-WA-NEE.

Beyond doubt, the dark form was that of a woman—a young one too, as evinced by her erect bearing, and a light, agile movement, exhibited at the moment of our first beholding her. The attire was odd; and consisted of a brownish-coloured tunic—apparently of doeskin leather—reaching from the neck to the knees; underneath which appeared leggings of like material, ending in moccasins that covered the feet. The arms, neck, and head were entirely bare; and the colour of the skin, as seen upon these, differed from that of the outer garment only in being a shade or two darker! The woman, therefore, was not white, but an *Indian:* as was made further evident by the sparkling of beads and bangles around her neck, rings in her ears, and metal circlets upon her arms—all reflecting the light of the moon in copious coruscations. As I brought my horse to a rest, I perceived that the figure was advancing towards us, and with rapid step.

My steed set his ears, and snorted with affright; the jade of the hunter had already given the example—each, no doubt, acting under the impulse of his rider.

Mine was a feeling of simple astonishment. Such an apparition in that place, and at that hour, was sufficient for surprise; but a more definite reason was, my observing that a different emotion had been roused in the breast of the young hunter—whose looks betrayed fear, rather than surprise.

'Fear of what?' I asked myself, as the figure advanced; and still more so, when it came near enough to enable me to make out

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the face. As far as the moonlight would permit me to judge, there was nothing in that face to fray either man or horse: certainly nothing to create an emotion, such as was depicted in the countenance of my companion.

The complexion was brown, as already observed; but the features, if not of the finest type, were yet comely enough to attract admiration; and they were lit up by a pair of eyes, whose liquid glance rivalled the sheen of the golden pendants sparkling on each side of them.

I should have been truly astonished at the behaviour of my guide, but for the natural reflection, that there was some cause for it, yet unknown to me. Evidently it was not his first interview with this forest maiden; for I could now perceive that the person who approached was not exactly a woman, but rather a well-grown girl on the eve of womanhood. She was of large stature, nevertheless, with bold outline of breast, and arms that gave token of something more than feminine strength. In truth she appeared possessed of a *physique* sufficiently formidable to inspire a cowardly man with fear—had such been her object; but I could perceive no signs of menace in her manner.

Neither could cowardice be an attribute of my travelling companion. There was an unexplained something, therefore, to account for his present display of the emotion.

On arriving within six paces of the heads of our horses, the Indian paused in her steps; as if hesitating to advance. Up to this time, she had not spoken a word; neither had my companion, beyond a phrase or two that had involuntarily escaped him, on first discovering her presence in the glade.

'She here? an at this time o' night?' I had heard him mutter to himself; but nothing more, until the girl had paused, as described. Then, in a low voice, and with a slightly trembling accent, he pronounced interrogatively the word 'Su-wa-nee?'

It was the name of the Indian maiden; but there was no reply.

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'Su-wa-nee?' repeated he, in a louder tone, 'is it you?'

The answer was also given interrogatively.

'Has the White Eagle lost his eyes, by gazing too long on the pale-faced fair ones of Swampville? There is light in the sky and the face of Su-wa-nee is turned to it. Let him look on it: it is not lovely like that of the *half-blood*, but the White Eagle will never see that face again.'

This declaration had a visible effect on the young hunter: the shade of sadness deepened upon his features; and I could hear a sigh, with difficulty suppresssd; while, at the same time, he appeared desirous of ending the interview.

'It's late, girl,' rejoined he, after a pause: 'what for are ye here?'

'Su-wa-nee is here for a purpose. For hours she has been waiting to see the White Eagle—the soft hands of the pale-faced maidens have held him long.'

'Waitin' to see me! What do ye want wi' me?'

'Let the White Eagle send the stranger aside. Su-wa-nee must speak to him alone.'

'Thar's no need o' that: it's a friend that's wi' me.'

'Would the White Eagle have his secrets known? There are some he may not wish even for a friend to hear. Su-wa-nee can tell him one that will crimson his cheeks like the flowers of the red maple.'

'I have no saycrets, girl—none as I'm afraid o' bein' heerd by anybody.'

'What of the half-blood?'

'I don't care to hear o' her.'

'The White Eagle speaks falsely; he does care to hear. He longs to know what has become of his lost Marian. Su-wa-nee can tell him.'

The last words produced an instantaneous change in the bearing of the young hunter; instead of the repelling attitude, he had hitherto observed towards the Indian girl, I saw him bend

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eagerly forward, as if desirous of hearing what she had to say Seeing that she had drawn his attention, the Indian again pointed to me, and inquired :

'Is the pale-faced stranger to know the love-secrets of the White Eagle?'

I saw that my companion no longer desired me to be a listener; and, without waiting for his reply, I drew my horse's head in the opposite direction, and was riding away.

In the turning, I came face to face with him; and by the moon light shining full upon his countenance, I fancied I could detect some traces of mistrust still lingering on it.

My fancy was not at fault: for, on brushing close past him, he leaned towards me, and, in an earnest manner, muttered :

'Please, stranger, don't go far—thar's danger in this girl She's been arter me before.'

I nodded assent to his request; and turning back into the little bay, that formed the embouchure of the path, I pulled up under the shadow of the trees.

At this point, I was not ten paces from the hunter, and could see him; but a little clump of white magnolias prevented me from seeing the girl—at the same time hiding both myself and horse from her sight.

The chirrup of the cicadas alone hindered me from hearing all of what was said; but many words reached my ear, and with sufficient distinctness, to give me a clue to the subject of the promised revelation.

Delicacy would have prompted me to retire a little farther off: but the singular caution I had recieved from my companion, prevented me from obeying its impulse.

I could make out that a certain Marian was the subject of the conversation; and then more distinctly, that it was Marian Holt —just as I expected, the daughter of my squatter: that other and older one, of whom mention has been already made.

This part of the revelation was easily understood: since I was

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already better than half prepared for it. Equally easy of com prehension was the fact, that this Marian was the sweetheart of my travelling companion—*had been*, I should rather say; for, from what followed, I could gather that she was no longer in the neighbourhood; but some months before had left it, or been carried away—spirited off in some mysterious manner, leaving no traces of the why or whither she had gone.

Nearly all this I had conjectured before; for the young hunter had half revealed it to me by his manner, if not by words. Now, however, a point or two was added to my previous information relating to the fair Marian. *She was married.* Married—and to some odd sort of man, of whom the Indian appeared to speak slightingly. His name I could make out to be Steevens, or Steebins, or something of the sort—not very intelligible from the Indian's mode of pronouncing it—and, furthermore, that he had been a schoolmaster in Swampville.

During the progress of the dialogue, I had my eye fixed on the young hunter. I could perceive that the announcement of the marriage was quite new to him; and its effect was as that of a sudden blow. Of course, equally unknown to him had been the name of the husband; though, from the exclamatory phrase that followed, he had no doubt formed his conjectures.

'O God!' exclaimed he, 'I thort so—the very man to a done it. Lord ha' mercy on her!'

All this was uttered in a voice hoarse with emotion.

'Tell me,' continued he, 'whar are they gone? Ye say ye know?'

The shrill screech of a tree-cricket, breaking forth at that moment, hindered me from hearing the reply. The more emphatic words only reached me, and these appeared to be 'Utah' and 'Great Salt Lake.' They were enough to fix the whereabouts of Marian Holt and her husband.

'One question more!' said the rejected lover, and he hesitated, as if afraid to ask it. 'Can you tell me—whether—she went wi.

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lin'ly, or whether—thar wan't some force used?—by her father, or some un else? - Can ye tell me that, girl?'

I listened eagerly for the response. Its importance can be easily understood by one who has *sued* in vain—one who has *wooed* without *winning*. The silence of the cricket favoured me; but a long interval passed, and there came not a word from the lips of the Indian!

'Answer me, Su-wa-nee!' repeated the young man in a more appealing tone. 'Tell me that, and I promise'——

'Will the White Eagle promise to forget his lost love? Will he promise'——

'No, Su-wa-nee; I cannot promise that; I can *niver* forget her.'

'The heart can *hate* without forgetting.'

'Hate her! hate Marian? No! no!'

'Not if she be false?'

'How do I know that she war false? You have not told me whether she went willin'ly or agin her consent.'

'The White Eagle shall know then. His gentle doe went willingly to the covert of the wolf—*willingly*, I repeat; and Su-wa-nee can give proof of her words.'

This was the most terrible stroke of all. I could see the hunter shrink in his saddle, while a death-like pallor overspread his cheeks, and his eyes presented the glassy aspect of despair.

'Now!' continued the Indian, as if taking advantage of the blow she had struck, 'will the White Eagle promise to sigh no more after his false mistress? Will he promise to love one that can be true?'

There was an earnestness in the tone in which these interrogatories were uttered—an appealing earnestness—suddenly prompted by a burning, headlong passion. It was now the turn of her who uttered them, to wait with anxiety for a response.

It came at length—perhaps to the laceration of that proud heart; for it was a negative to its dearest desire.

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'No, no!' exclaimed the hunter confusedly. 'Impossible eyther to hate or forget her. She may a been false, an' no doubt are so; but it's too late for me; *I can niver love agin*

A half-suppressed scream followed this declaration, succeeded by some words that appeared to be uttered in a tone of menace or reproach. But the words were in the Chickasaw tongue; and I could not comprehend their import.

Almost at the same instant, I saw the young hunter hurriedly turning his horse—as if to ride away.

I fancied that the crisis had arrived, when my presence might be required; and under this belief, I touched my steed with the spur, and trotted out into the open ground.

To my astonishment, I perceived that the hunter was alone The girl had disappeared from the glade!

CHAPTER XV.

MAKING A CLEAN BREAST OF IT.

'Where is she?—gone?' I mechanically asked, in a tone that must have betrayed my surprise.

'Yes—gone! gone! an' wi' a Mormon!'

'A Mormon?'

'Ay, stranger, a Mormon—a man wi' twenty wives? God forgi' her! I'd rather a heerd o' her death!'

'Was there a man with her? I saw no one!'

O stranger, excuse my talk—you're thinkin' o' that ere Injun girl? 'Taint her I'm speakin' about.'

'Who then?'

The young hunter hesitated; he was not aware that I was already in possession of his secret; but he knew that I had beer

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witness of his emotions, and to declare the name would be to reveal the most sacred thought of his heart.

Only for a moment did he appear to reflect; and then, as if relieved from his embarrassment by some sudden determination, he replied:

'Stranger, I don't see why I shedn't tell ye all about this bisness. I don't know the reezun, but you've made me feel a kind o' confidence in you. I know it's a silly sort o' thing to fall in love wi' a handsum girl; but if ye'd only seen *her*.'

'I have no doubt, from what you say, she was a beautiful creature'—this was scarcely my thought at the moment—'and as for falling in love with a pretty girl, none of us are exempt from that little weakness. The proud Roman conquerer yielded to the seductions of the brown-skinned Egyptian queen: and even Hercules himself was conquered by a woman's charms. There's no particular silliness in that; it is but the common destiny of man.'

'Well, stranger, it's been myen; an' I've hed reezun to be sorry for it; but it's no use tryin' to shet up the stable arter the hoss's been stolen out o't. She are gone now; and that's the end o' it. I reckon I'll niver set eyes on her agin.'

The sigh that accompanied this last observation, with the melancholy tone in which it was uttered, told me that I was talking to a man who had truly loved.

'No doubt,' thought I, 'some strapping backwoods wench has been the object of his passion'—for what other idea could I have about the child of a coarse and illiterate squatter? 'Love is as blind as a bat; and this red-haired hoyden has appeared a perfect Venus in the eyes of the handsome fellow—as not unfrequently happens—a Venus, with evidently a slight admixture of the prudential Juno in her composition. The young backwoodsman is poor; the schoolmaster perhaps a little better off; in all probability not much, but enough to decide the preference of the shrewd Marian.'

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Such were my reflections at the moment, partly suggested by my own experience.

'But you have not yet told me who this sweetheart was? Not the Indian damsel you've just parted with?'

'No, stranger, nothin' o' the kind; though there are some Injun in *her* too. 'Twar o' her the girl spoke, when ye hear her talk o' a half-blood. She ain't jest that—she's more white than Injun; her mother only war a half-blood—o' the Chicasaw nation, that used to b'long in these parts.'

'Her name?'

'It *war* Marian Holt; it are now Stebbins, I s'pose: since "ve just heerd she's married to a fellur o' that name.'

'She has certainly not improved her name.'

'She are the daughter o' Holt, the squatter—the same whar you say you're a-goin'. Thar's another, as I told ye; but she's a younger un. Her name's Lilian.'

'A pretty name. The older sister was very beautiful then?'

'I niver set eyes on the like o' her.'

'Does the younger one resemble her?'

'Ain't a bit like her—different as a squ'll from a coon.'

'She's *not* beautiful then?'

'Well, that depends on people's way o' thinkin'. Most people as knew 'em liked Lilian the best, and thort her the hansumnest o' the two. That wan't my notion. Besides, Lilly's only a young critter—not out o' her teens, as they say.'

'But if she be also pretty, why not try to fall in love with her? Down in Mexico, where I've been lately, they have a shrewd saying: *Un clavo saca otro clavo*, meaning, that "one nail drives out another"—as much as to say, that one love cures another.'

'Ah, stranger! that may be all very well in Mexico, whar I've heerd they ain't partickler about their way o' lovin': but we've a sayin' here jest the contrairy o' that: "two bars can't get into the same trap."'

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'Ha, ha, ha! Well, your backwoods proverb is perhaps the truer one, as it is the more honest. But you have not yet told me the full particulars of your affair with Marian? You say she has gone away from the neighborhood?

'You shall hear it all, stranger. I reckon there can be no harm in tellin' it to *you*; an', if you've a mind to listen, I'll make a clean breast o' the whole bisness.'

The hunter proceeded with his revelation—to him a painful one—and, although I had already divined most of the particulars, I interrupted him only with an occasional interrogative. The story was as I had anticipated. He had been in love with Marian Holt; and was under the impression that she returned it. She had given him frequent meetings in the forest—in that very glade where we had encountered the Indian girl, and in which we were still lingering—her father was not aware of these interviews, as there had been some coolness between him and the young hunter, and the lovers feared that he might not approve of their conduct. This was the prologue of the hunter's story The epilogue I give in his own words.

''Twar a mornin'—jest five months ago—she had promised to meet me here; an I war seated on yonder log waitin' for her Jest then, some Injuns war comin' through the gleed. That girl ye saw war one o' 'em. She had a nice bullet-pouch to sell, an' I bought it. The girl would insist on puttin' it on: an' while she war doin' so, I war fool enough to gie her a kiss. Some devil hed put it in my head. Jest at that minnit, who shed come right into the gleed but Marian herself! I meant nothin' by kissin' the Injun; but I s'pose Marian thort I did: she'd already talked to me 'bout this very girl; an' I believe war a leetle bit jealous o' her—for the Injun ain't to say ill-lookin'. I wanted to 'pologise to Marian; but she wouldn't listen to a word; an' went off, in a way I niver seed her in before. 'Twar the last time I ever set eyes on her.'

'Indeed!'

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'Ay, stranger, an' it's only this minnit, an' from that same Injun girl, that I've heerd she's married, an' gone off to the Mormons. The Injun's had it from some o' her people, that seed Marian a crossin' the parairies.'

'This Indian damsel—Su-wa-nee I think you named her—what of her? She appears to take a considerable interest your affairs.'

'Ah! stranger, that's another o' the consequences o' doin' what wan't right. Since the day I gin her that kiss, she'd niver let me alone, but used to bother me every time I met her in the woods; an' wud a come arter me to my own cabin, if it hadn't a been for the dogs, that wud tar an Injun to pieces. She war afeerd o' them; but not o' me, no matter how I thraitened her.

'I war so angry wi' her, for what had happened—though, arter all, 'twar more my fault than hern—but I war so vexed wi' her about the ill-luck, that I used to keep out o' her way as well as I could, an' didn't speak to her for a long time. She got riled 'bout that, an' thraitened revenge; an' one night, as I war comin from Swampville, 'bout this time, only 'twar as dark as a pot o' pitch, I war just comin' out into this very gleed, when all of a suddint my ole hoss gin a jump forrard, an' I feeled somethin' prick me from behind. 'Twar the stab o' some sort o' a knife, that cut me a leetle above the hip, an' made me bleed like a buck. I know'd who did it; tho' not that night—for it war so dark among the bushes, I couldn't see a steim; but I kim back in the mornin', an' seed tracks. They were the tracks o' a moccasin; an' I know'd them to be hern.'

'Su-wa-nee's tracks?'

'Sartin. I know'd them well enough, as I'd often seed her tracks through the crik bottom.'

'Did you take no steps to punish her?'

'Well—no—I didn't.'

'How is that? I think it would have been but prudent of

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you to have done something—if only to prevent a recurrence of the danger.'

'Well, stranger, to tell the truth, I war a leetle ashamed o' the whole bisness. Had it been a man, I'd a punished *him*; but they *do* say the girl's in love wi' me, arter her Injun way: an' I didn't like to be revengeful. Besides, it war mostly my own fault I had no bisness to a fooled wi' her.'

'And you think she will not trouble you again?'

'I don't know about that, arter what's happened the night. She's gone away thraitnin' agin. I did think she'd gin up the notion o' revenge; for she know'd I'd found out that 'twar her stabbed me. I told her so the next time I seed her, an' she 'peared pleased 'bout my not havin' her ta'en up. She said it war generous o' the White Eagle—that's the name her people gies me—for thar's a gang o' them still lives down the crik. She gin me a sort o' promise she wouldn't trouble me agin; but I warn't sure o' her; an' that's the reezun, stranger, I didn't want ye to go fur away.'

'I think it would be prudent in you to keep well on your guard. She appears to be rather an unreflecting damsel; and from what you have told me, a dangerous one. She certainly has a strange way of showing her affection; but it must be confessed, you gave her some provocation; and, as the poet says, "Hell knows no greater fury than a woman scorned."

'That's true, stranger.'

'Her conduct, however, has been too violent to admit of justification. You appear to have been unfortunate in your sweet hearts—with each in an opposite sense; one loves you too much, and the other apparently not enough! But how is it you did not see her again—Marian I mean?'

'Well, you understand, I warn't on the best o' tarms wi' old Hick Holt, an' couldn't go to his clarin'. Besides, arter what had happened, I didn't like to go near Marian, anyhow—least

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wise for a while. I thort it would blow over, 's soon's she'd find out that I war only jokin' wi the Injun.'

'So one would have supposed.'

'"Twar nigh two weeks afore I heerd anythin' o' her; and then I larned that she war gone away! Nobody could tell why or whar, for nobody knew, 'ceptin Hick Holt hisself; an' he ain't the sort o' man to tell saycrets. Lord o' mercy? I know *now*; an' it's worse than I expected. I'd sooner a heerd she war dead.'

A deep-drawn sigh, from the very bottom of his soul, admonished me that the speaker had finished his painful recital.

I had no desire to prolong the conversation; I saw that silence would be more agreeable to my companion; and, as if by a mutual and tacit impulse, we turned our horses' heads to the path; and proceeded onwards across the glade.

As we were about entering the timber on the other side, my guide reined up his horse, and sat for a moment gazing upon a particular spot—as if something there had attracted his attention. But what? There was no visible object—at least, none that was remarkable—on the ground, or elsewhere!

Another sigh, with the speech that followed, explained the singularity of his behaviour.

'Thar!' said he, pointing to the entrance of the forest path—'thar's the place whar I last looked on Marian!'

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CHAPTER XVI.

A PREDICAMENT IN PROSPECT.

For half a mile beyond the glade, the trace continued wide enough to admit of our riding abreast; but, notwithstanding this advantage, no word passed between us. My guide had fallen back into his attitude of melancholy—deepened, no doubt, by the intelligence he had just received—and sat loosely in his saddle, his head drooping forward over his breast. Bitter thoughts within rendered him unconscious of what was passing without; and I felt that any effort I might make to soften the acerbity of his reflections would be idle. There are moments when words of consolation may be spoken in vain—when, instead of soothing a sorrow, they add poison to its sting.

I made no attempt, therefore, to rouse my companion from his revery, but rode on by his side, as silently as he.

Indeed, there was sufficient unpleasantness in my own reflections to give me occupation. Though troubled by no heart-canker of the past, I had a future before me that was neither brilliant nor attractive; and the foreknowledge I had now gained of the squatter Holt, had imbued me with a keen presentiment, that I was treading upon the edge of a not very distant dilemma.

Once, or twice, I was on the point of communicating my whole affair to my travelling companion; and why not? With the openness of an honest heart, he had confided to me the most important, as well as the most painful secret of his life; why should I withhold my confidence from him on a subject of comparatively little importance?

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My reason for not making a confidant of him sooner has been already given. It no longer existed. So far from finding in him an ally of my yet hypothetical enemy, in all likelihood I should have him on my side—at all events, I felt certain I might count upon his advice; and, with his knowledge of the *situation*, that might be worth having.

I was on the eve of declaring the object of my errand, and soliciting his counsel thereon, when I saw him suddenly rein in, and turn towards me. In the former movement, I imitated his example.

'The road forks here,' said he; 'the path on the left goes straight down to Holt's clarin'—the other's the way to my bit o' a shanty.'

'I shall have to thank you for the very kind service you have done me, and say "good night."'

'No—not yet. I ain't a goin' to leave ye, till I've put you 'ithin sight o' Holt's cabin, tho' I can't go wi' ye to the house: as I told ye, he an' I ain't on the best o' tarms.'

'I cannot think of your coming out of your way—especially at this late hour. I'm some little of a tracker myself; and, perhaps I can make out the path.'

'No, stranger! Thar's places whar the trace is a'most blind, an' you might get out o' it. Thar'll be no moon out. It runs through a thick timbered bottom, an' thar's an ugly bit o' swamp. As for the lateness, I'm not very regular in that way; an' there's a sort o' road up the crik by which I can get home. 'Twan't to bid you good night that I stopped here.'

'What then?' thought I, trying to conjecture his purpose, while he was pausing in his speech.

'Stranger!' continued he in an altered tone, 'I hope you won't take offence if I ask you a question?'

'Not much fear of that, I fancy: ask it freely.'

'Are ye sure o' a bed at Holt's?'

'Well, upon my word, to say the truth, I am by no means sure

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of one. It don't signify, however; I have my old cloak and my saddle; and it wouldn't be the first time, by hundreds, I've slept in the open air.'

'My reezuns for askin you are, that, if you ain't sure o' one, an' don't mind stretchin' yourself on a bar-skin, thar's such a thing in my shanty, entirely at your sarvice.'

'It's very kind of you; and perhaps I may have occasion to avail myself of your offer. In truth, I am not very confident of meeting with a friendly reception at the hands of your neighbour Holt, much less to be asked to partake of his hospitality.'

'D' ye say so?'

'Indeed, yes. From what I have heard, I have reason to anticipate rather a cold welcome.'

'Indeed? But'——

My companion hesitated in his speech—as if meditating some observation which he felt delicate about making.

'I'm a'most ashamed,' continued he, at length, 'to put another question, that war on the top o' my tongue.'

'I shall take pleasure in answering any question you may think proper to ask me.'

'I shedn't ask it, if it wa'nt for what you've jest now said; for I heerd the same question put to you this night afore, an' I heerd your answer to it. But I reckon it war the *way* in which it war asked that offended you; an' on that account your answer war jest as it should a been?'

To what question do you refer?'

'To your bisness out here wi' Hick Holt. I don't want to know it, out o' any curiosity o' my own—that's sartin, stranger.'

'You are welcome to know all about it. Indeed, it was my intention to have told you before we parted; as well as to ask you for some advice upon the matter.'

Without further parley, I communicated the object of my visit to Mud Creek—concealing nothing that I deemed necessary for the elucidation of the subject. Without a word of interruption

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the young hunter heard my story to the end; but from the play of his features, as I revealed the more salient points, I could perceive that my chances of an amicable adjustment of my claim were far from being brilliant.

'Well, do you know,' said he, when I had finished speaking, 'I had a suspeecion that that might be your bisness. I don't know why I shed a thort so; but may be 'twar because thar's been some others come here to settle o' late, an' found squatters on thar groun'—jest the same as Holt's on yourn. That's why ye heerd me say, a while ago, that I shedn't like to buy over *his* head.'

'And why not?'

I awaited the answer to this question, not without a certain degree of nervous anxiety; I was beginning to comprehend the counsel of my Nashville friend on the ticklish point of *pre-emption*.

'Why, you see, stranger; as I told you, Hick Holt's a rough customer; an' I reckon he'll be an *ugly* one to deal wi', on a bisness o' that kind.'

'Of course, being in possession, he may purchase the land. He has the right of pre-emption.'

''Taint for that. *He* aint agoin' to *pre-empt*, nor buy neyther, an' for the best o' reezuns: he hain't got a red cent in the world, an' couldn't buy as much land as would make him a millyun patch—not he.'

'How does he get his living, then?'

'Oh, as for that, jest some'at like myself. Thar's gobs o' game in the woods—both bar an' deer; an' the clarin' grows him corn. Thar's squ'lls, an' possums, an' turkeys too; an' lots o' fish in the crik—if one gets tired o' the bar an' deer meat, which I shed niver do.'

'But how about clothing, and other necessaries that are not found in the woods?'

'As for our clothin', *it* ain't hard to find. We can get that in Swampville, by swopping skins for it, or now an' then some deer

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meat. O' anythin' else, thar ain't much needed 'bout here—powder, an' lead, an' a pound or two o' coffee, an' tobacco. Once in a while, if ye like it, a leetle *old corn*.'

'Corn! I thought the squatter raised that for himself?'

'So he do raise corn; but I see, stranger, you don't understand our odd names. Thar's two kinds o' corn in these parts—that as has been to the still, and that as hain't. It's the first o' these sorts that Hick Holt likes best.'

'Oh! I perceive your meaning. He's fond of a little corn whisky, I presume?'

'I reckon he are—that same squatter—fonder o't than milk.'

'But surely,' continued the hunter, changing the subject, as well as the tone of his speech,—'surely, stranger, you ain't agoin' on your bisness the night?'

'I've just begun to think, that it is rather an odd hour to enter upon an estate. The idea didn't occur to me before.'

'Besides,' added he, 'thar's another reezun. If Hick Holt's what he used to be, he ain't likely to be very *nice* about this time o' night. I haint seen much o' him lately; but I reckon he's as fond o' a drink as ever he war; an' 'taint often he goes to *his* bed 'ithout a skinful. Thar's ten chances agin one, o' your findin' him wi' a brick in his hat.'

'That would be awkward.'

'Don't think o' goin' to night,' continued the young hunter in a persuasive tone. 'Come along wi' me; an' you can ride down to Holt's in the mornin'. You'll then find him more raisonable to deal wi'. I can't offer you no great show o' entertainment; but thar's a piece o' deer-meat in the house, an' I reckon I can raise a cup o' coffee, an' a pone or two o' bread. As for your horse, the old corn-crib ain't quite empty yet.

'Thanks—thanks!' said I, grasping the hunter's hand in the warmth of my gratitude. 'I accept your invitation.'

'This way, then, stranger!'

We struck into the path that led to the right; and, after riding

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about two miles further, arrived at the solitary home of the hunter—a log-cabin surrounded by a clearing.

I soon found that he was its sole occupant, as he was its owner—some half-dozen large dogs being the only living creatures, that were there to bid us welcome.

A rude horse-shed was at hand—a 'loose box' it might be termed, as it was only intended to accommodate one—and this was placed at the disposal of my Arab. The 'critter' of my host had, for that night, to take to the woods, and choose his stall among the trees; but to that he was well inured.

A close-chinked cabin for a lodging; a bear-skin for a bed; cold venison, corn-bread, and coffee for supper: with a pipe to follow; all these, garnished with the cheer of a hearty welcome, constitute an entertainment not to be despised by an old campaigner; and such was the treatment I met with, under the hospitable *clapboard* roof of the young backwoodsman—Frank Wingrove.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE INDIAN SUMMER.

Look forth on the forest ere autumn wind scatters
  Its frondage of scarlet, and purple, and gold:
That forest, through which the great 'Father of Waters'
  For thousands of years his broad current has rolled!
Gaze over that forest of opaline hue,
With a heaven above it of glorious blue,
And say is there scene, in this beautiful world,
Where nature more gaily her flag has unfurled?
Or think'st thou, that e'en in the regions of bliss,
There's a landscape more truly Elysian than this?
Behold the dark sumac in crimson arrayed,
  Whose veins with the deadliest poison are rife

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And, side by her side, on the edge of the glade,
  The sassafras laurel, restorer of life!
Behold the tall maples turned red in their hue,
And the muscadine vine, with its clusters of blue;
And the lotus, whose leaves have scarce time to unfold,
Ere they drop, to discover its berries of gold;
And the bay-tree, perfumed, never changing its sheen
But for ever enrobed in its mantle of green!
And list to the music borne over the trees!
  It falls on the ear, giving pleasure ecstatic—
The song of the birds and the hum of the bees
  Commingling their tones with the ripples erratic.
Hark! hear you the red-crested cardinal's call
From the groves of annona?—from tulip-tree tall?
The mock-bird responding?—below, in the glade,
The dove softly cooing in mellower shade?
While the oriole answers in accents of mirth—
Oh, where is there melody sweeter on earth?
In infamy now the bold slanderer slumbers,
  Who falsely declared 'twas a land without song!
Had he listened, as I, to those musical numbers
  That liven its woods through the summer-day long—
Had he slept in the shade of it blossoming trees,
Or inhaled their sweet balm ever loading the breeze,
  He would scarcely have ventured on statements so wrong—
  'Her plants without perfume, her birds without song.'
Ah! closet-philosopher, sure, in that hour,
You had never beheld the magnolia's flower!
Surely here the Hesperian gardens were found—
  For how could such land to the gods be unknown?
And where is there spot upon African ground
  So like to a garden a goddess would own?
And the dragon so carelessly guarding the tree,
Which the hero, whose guide was a god of the sea,
Destroyed before plucking the apples of gold—
Was naught but that monster—the mammoth of old;
If earth ever owned spot so divinely caressed,
Sure that region of old was the land of the West?

The memory of that scene attunes my soul to song, awaking

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my muse from the silence in which she has long slumbered But the voice of the coy maiden is less melodious than of yore; she shies me for my neglect: and despite the gentlest courting refuses to breathe her divine spirit over a scene, worthy of a sweeter strain.

And this scene lay not upon the classic shores of the Hellespont—not in the famed valleys of Alp and Apennine—not by the romantic borders of the Rhine, but upon the banks of *Mud Creek* in the state of Tennessee!

In truth, it was a lovely landscape, or rather a succession of landscapes, through which I rode, after leaving the cabin of my hospitable host. It was the season of 'Indian summer'—that singular phenomenon of the occidental clime, when the sun, as if rueing his southern declension, appears to return along the line of the zodiac. He loves better the 'Virgin' than 'Aquarius;' and lingering to take a fond look on that fair valley he has fertilised by his beams, dispels for a time his intruding antagonist, the hoary Boreas. But his last kiss kills: there is too much passion in his parting glance. The forest is fired by its fervour; and many of its fairest forms the rival god of the north may never clasp in his cold embrace. With suttee-like devotion, they scorn to shun the flame; but with outstretched arms inviting it, offer themselves as a holocaust to him, who, through the long summer day, has smiled upon their trembling existence.

At this season of the year, too, the virgin forest is often the victim of another despoiler—the *hurricane*. Sweeping them with spiteful breath, this rude destroyer strikes down the trees like fragile reeds, prostrating at once the noblest and humblest forms. Not one is left standing on the soil: for the clearing of the hurricane is a complete work; and neither stalk, sapling, nor stump may be seen, where it has passed. Even the giants of the forest yield to its strength, as though smitten by the hand of a destroying angel! Uprooted, they lie along the earth, side by side—the soil still clinging to the clavicles of their roots, and

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their leafy tops turned to the lee—in this regular allignment slowly to wither and decay!

A forest, thus prostrate, presents for a time a picture of melancholy aspect. It suggests the idea of some grand battle-field, where the serried hosts, by a terrible discharge of 'grape and canister,' have been struck down on the instant: not one being left to touch the bodies of the slain—neither to bury nor remove them. Like the battle-field, too, it becomes the haunt of wolves and other wild beasts; who find among the fallen trunks, if not food, a fastness securing them from the pursuit both of hound and hunter. Here in hollow log the black she-bear gives birth to her loutish cubs, training them to climb over the prostrate trunks; here the lynx and red cougar choose their cunning covert; here the raccoon rambles over his beaten track; the sly opossum crawls warily along the log, or goes to sleep among the tangle of dry rhizomes; and the gaunt brown wolf may be often heard howling amidst the ruin, or in hoarse bark baying the midnight moon.

In a few years, however, this sombre scene assumes a more cheerful aspect: an undergrowth springs up, that soon conceals the skeletons of the dead trees: plants and shrubs appear—often of different genera and species from those that hitherto usurped the soil—and the ruin is no longer apparent. Its mournful picture has given place to one of luxuriant sweetness: the more brilliant sheen of the young trees and shrubs, now covering the ground, forming an agreeable contrast with the sombre hues of the surrounding forest. No longer reigns that melancholy silence, that, for a while, held dominion over the scene. If, at intervals, be heard the wild scream of the cougar, or the distant howling of wolves, these scarcely interrupt the music falling endlessly upon the ear, poured out from the throats of varied songsters—the red cardinals, the orioles, the warbling *fringillidæ*, and the polyglott thrushes—who meet here, as if by agreement, to make this lovely sylvan spot the scene of their forest concerts.

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Shortly after leaving the cabin of the young backwoodsman, my path, hitherto passing under the gloomy shadows of the forest, debouched upon just such a scene. I had been warned of its proximity: my host, at parting, had given me directions as to how I should find my way across the *herrikin*, through which ran the trace that conducted to the clearing of the squatter—some two miles further down the creek.

I was prepared to behold a track of timber laid prostrate by the storm—the trees all lying in one direction, and exhibiting the usual scathed and dreary aspect; but instead of this, on emerging from the dark forest, I was agreeably surprised by the glorious landscape that burst upon my view.

It was, as already stated, that season of the year when the American woods array themselves in their most attractive robes—when the very leaves appear as if they were flowers, so varied and brilliant are their hues—when the foliage of the young beeches becomes a pale yellow, and glimmers translucent against the sun—when the maples are dyeing off of a deep red, and the sumac and sassafras turning respectively crimson and scarlet—when the large drupes of the Osage orange, the purple clusters of the fox-grape, and the golden berries of the persimmon or Virginian lotus, hang temptingly from the tree—just at that season when the benignant earth has perfected, and is about to yield up, her annual bounty; and all nature is gratefully rejoicing at the gift.

No wonder I was agreeably impressed by the gorgeous landscape—no wonder I reined up, and permitted my eyes to dwell upon it; while my heart responded to the glad chorus, that from bird and bee, was rising up to heaven around me! I too felt joyous under the reflection, that, amid such lovely scenes, I had chosen my future home.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

A BACKWOODS VENUS.

After indulging for some time in a sort of dreamy contemplation, I once more gave the bridle to my horse, and rode onward.

I was prepared for a tortuous path: my host had forewarned me of this. The *herrikin*, he said, was only about three hundred yards in breadth; but I should have to ride nearly twice that distance, in crossing it; and his statement proved literally true.

The old trace, passing down the creek bottom, had run at right angles to the direction of the storm; and, of course, the trees had fallen perpendicularly across the path—where they still lay, thick as hurdles set for a donkey-race. Some of them could be stepped over by a horse, and a few might be jumped; but there were others that rose breast high; and a flying leap over a five-barred gate would have been an easy exploit, compared with clearing one of these monstrous barriers. I might add, also, from experience, that leaping a log is a feat of considerable danger. There is no room for 'topping;' and should the iron hoof strike, there is nothing that will yield—but on the other side the pleasant prospect of a broken neck—either for the horse or his rider!

Not being in any particular hurry, I took the matter quietly; and wound my way through a labyrinth worthy of being the maze of Fair Rosamond.

I could not help remarking the singular effect which the *herrikin* had produced. To the right and left, as far as my view could range, extended an opening, like some vast avenue that had been cleared for the passage of giants, and by giants made

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On each side appeared the unbroken forest—the trunks standing like columns, with shadowy aisles between: the outward or edge row trending in a straight line, as if so planted These showed not a sign that the fierce tornado had passed so near them; though others, whose limbs almost interlocked with theirs, had been mowed down without mercy by the ruthless storm.

I had arrived within fifty yards of the opposite side, and the dark forest was again before my face; but even at that short distance, the eye vainly endeavoured to pierce its sombre depths.

I was congratulating myself that I had passed the numerous logs that lay across the path, when yet one more appeared between me and the standing trees. It had been one of the tallest victims of the tornado; and now lay transversely to the line of the track, which cut it about midway. On nearing this obstacle, I saw that the trace forked into two—one going around the tops of the decaying branches, while the other took the direction of the roots; which, with the soil still adhering to them, formed a round buttresslike wall of full ten feet in diameter. The trunk itself was not over five—that being about the thickness of the tree.

It was a matter of choice which of the paths should be followed, since both appeared to come together again on the opposite side of the tree; but I had made up my mind to take neither. One of my motives, in seeking this forest-home, had been a desire to indulge in the exciting exercise of the chase; and the sooner I should bring my horse into practice, the sooner I might take the field with a prospect of success. Log-leaping was new to my Arab; and he might stand in need of a little training to it. The log before me had open ground on both sides; and afforded a very good opportunity for giving him his first lesson.

Thus prompted by St. Hubert, I was about spurring forward to the run; when a hoof-stroke falling upon my ear, summoned me to desist from my intention.

The sound proceeded from the forest before my face; and,

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peering into its darkness, I could perceive that some one, also on horseback, was coming along the path.

This caused me to change my design, or rather to pause until the person should pass; for had I continued in my determination to leap the log, I should, in all likelihood, have dashed my horse at full gallop against that of the approaching traveller; since our courses lay directly head to head.

While waiting till he should ride out of the way, I became aware that I had commited an error—only in regard to the *sex* of the person who was approaching. It was not a *he!* On the contrary, something so very different that, as soon as I had succeeded in shading the sun-glare out of my eyes, and obtained a fair view of the equestrian traveller, my indifference was at an end: I beheld one of the loveliest apparitions ever made manifest in female form, or, I need scarcely add, in any other shape.

It was a young girl—certainly not over sixteen years of age—but with a contour close verging upon womanhood. Her beauty was of that character, which cannot be set forth by a detailed description in words. In true loveliness, there is a harmony of the features that will not suffer them to be considered apart; nor does the eye take note of any one, to regard it as unique or characteristic: it is satisfied with the *coup d'œil* of the whole, if I may be permitted the expression. Real beauty needs not to be considered: it is acknowledged at a glance: eye and heart, impressed with it at the same instant, search not to study its details.

The impression made upon me at first sight of this young girl, was that of something soft and strikingly beautiful, of a glorious golden hue—the reflection of bright amber-coloured hair on a blond skin, tinged with a hue of vermilion—something that imparted a sort of luminous radiance divinely feminine Even under the shadow of the forest, this luminous radiance was apparent—as if the face had a *halo* around it! The reader may smile at such exalted ideas, and deem them the offspring of a

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romantic fancy; but had he looked, as I, into the liquid depths of those large eyes, with their blue irides and darker pupils; had he gazed upon that cheek tinted as with cochineal--those lips shaming the hue of the rose—that throat of ivory white—those golden tresses translucent in the sunlight—he would have felt as I, that something *shone* before his eyes—a face such as the Athenian fancy has elaborated into an almost living reality, in the goddess Cytherea.

In short, it was the Venus of *my* fancy—the very ideal I had imbibed from gazing upon many a picture of the Grecian goddess The prognostication of my friend had proved emphatically false. If not *Venus* I saw before me, it was her *counterpart* in human form!

And this fair creature was costumed in the simplest manner—almost coarsely clad. A sleeved dress of homespun with a yellowish stripe, loosely worn, and open at the breast. A cotton sun-bonnet' was the only covering for her head—her bright amber-coloured hair the only shawl upon her shoulders, over which it fell in ample luxuriance. A string of pearls around her neck—false ones, I could see—was the sole effort that vanity seemed to have made: for there was no other article of adornment. Even shoes and stockings were wanting; but the most costly *chaussure* could not have added to the elegance of those *mignon* feet, that, daintily protruding below the homespun skirt, fell along the flank of the horse.

More commonplace even than her homespun frock was the steed that carried her—a sorry-looking animal, that resembled the skeleton of a horse with the skin left on! There was no saddle—scarce the semblance of one. A piece of bear-skin, strapped over the back with a rough thong, did service for a saddle; and the little feet hung loosely down without step or stirrup. The girl kept her seat, partly by balancing, and as much by holding on to the high bony withers of the horse, that rose above his shoulders like the hump of a dromedary. The

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scant mane, wound around her tiny fingers, scarcely covered them; while with the other hand she clasped the black reins of an old dilapidated bridle.

The want of saddle and stirrup did not hinder her from poising herself gracefully upon the piece of bear-skin; but hers was a figure that could not be ungraceful in any attitude; and, as the old horse hobbled along, the rude movement all the more palpably displayed the magnificent moulding of her body and limbs.

The contrast between horse and rider—the old *critter* and the young *creature*—was ridiculously striking: the former appearing a burlesque on the most beautiful of quadrupeds, while the latter was the very impersonation of the loveliest of biped forms.

It is scarcely probable that the Cyprian goddess could ever have been brought into such ludicrous juxtaposition—a shame upon Mercury if she was! In classic lore, we find mention of no such sorry steed; and, for his counterpart in story, we must seek in more modern times—fixing upon the famed charger of Calatrava's knight. But here the analogy must end: the charms of the dark-haired Dulcinea can be brought into no comparison with those of the golden-haired wood-nymph of the Obion Bottom.

CHAPTER XIX.

A SERIES OF CONTRE-TEMPS.

At sight of this charming equestrian, all thoughts of leaping the log were driven out of my mind; and I rode quietly forward, with the intention of going round it.

It might be that I timed the pace of my horse—*mechanically* no doubt—but, however that may have been, I arrived at the pro

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strate tree, just as the young girl reached it from the opposite side: and we were brought face to face, the log-barrier between us.

I would have spoken: but, for the life of me, I could not think of something graceful to say: and to have used the hackneyed phraseology of 'Fine morning, miss!' would, in those beautiful blue eyes that glistened under the shadow of the sun-bonnet, have rendered me as commonplace as the remark. I felt certain it would; and therefore said nothing. Some acknowledgment, however, was necessary, and, lifting the forage-cap from my head, I bowed—slightly, as such a salutation required—but with all the *verve* that politeness would permit.

My salutation was acknowledged by a nod, and, as I fancied, a smile. Either was grace enough for me to expect; but, whether the smile was the offspring of a feeling in my favour, or at my expense, I was unable at the moment to decide.

I should have an opportunity of repeating the bow, as we met again in going round the tree. Then I should certainly speak to her; and as I turned my horse's head to the path, I set about thinking of something to say.

I had taken the path leading to the right, and which passed around the root: since of the two ways this appeared to be the shortest and most used. What was my chagrin, when, in glancing over my arm, I perceived that I had made a most grievous mistake; *she* was going in the opposite direction!

Yes—she had chosen to go round the branching tops of the dead-wood—by all the gods, a much wider circuit!

Was it accident or design? It had the appearance of the latter. I fancied so, and fell many degrees in my own estimation. Her taking what was evidently the 'roundabout' direction, argued unwillingness that we should meet again; for the *mazy* movement we were now performing precluded all chance of a second encounter, except with the great log still between us; and even that no longer *vis-à-vis* as before, but *dos-à-dos*, almost on the instant of our approaching!

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To insure even this poor privilege, I rode rapidly round the great buttress of roots, that for a moment concealed the fair equestrian from my sight. I did this with the intention of being forward in time. So rapidly did I pass, and so absorbed was in the idea of another sweet salutation, that I saw not the fearful creature that lay basking upon the log—on the sunny side of the upheaved mass of earth.

Once on the other side, I discovered that I had made a third mistake—equally as provoking as the second—I had arrived *too soon!* Golden-hair was away up among the tangle of the tree-tops. I could see her bright face gleaming through the branches—now and then hidden by the broad leaves of the bignonias that laced them together; and to make me still more miserable, I fancied that she was moving with a *studied slowness!*

I had already reached that point where the path parted from the log. I dared not pause: there was no excuse for it—not even the shadow of one could I think of—and, with a lingering look toward that glittering attraction, I reluctantly headed my horse to the forest.

A last glance over my shoulder made no improvement in my situation; she was still behind the trellised leaf-work of the bignonias; she had stayed perhaps to pluck a flower.

'Happier far if I had never seen her!' was the reflection that occurred to me, as I entered under the gloomy shadow of the trees—less gloomy than my own thoughts.

With one thing I now reproached myself: why had I been so shy with this forest damsel? the very way to secure her indifference. Why had I not *spoken* to her, if only in commonplace. Even 'Good-day' would have promised me a response; and the result could not have been more unfavourable. Why the deuce had I not bidden 'Good-day?'

I should have heard her voice—no doubt an additional charm—for I never yet saw a beautiful woman with a harsh voice; and I fear the inverse proposition is equally true. Why passed

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I without speaking? No doubt she deems me a *yokel*. Perhaps it was my very shyness she was smiling at? S'death! what a simpleton—— Ho! what do I hear? A woman's voice—a cry? —of terror? There again!—a scream! the words, 'Help, oh! help!' Is it she who is calling? Yes—yes—it is she!

By such strange sounds were my reflections interrupted.

Turning my horse with a wrench, I urged him back along the path. I was yet scarcely a dozen lengths from the log—for the reflections above detailed were but the thoughts of a moment.

Half a dozen leaps of my steed brought me back to the edge of the standing timber; where I pulled up, to ascertain the purport of the singular summons that had reached me.

I made no inquiry: no explanation was needed: the scene explained itself; for, at the moment of my emerging from the shadowy path, I had a tableau under my eyes, expressive as it was terrifying.

The girl was upon the other side of the log, and near the point where she should have turned off from it; but, instead of advancing, I saw that she had come to a halt—her attitude expressing the wildest terror, as if some fearful object was before her! The jade, too, showed affright, by snorting loudly—his head raised high in air, and his long ears pointing forward.

The young girl was dragging mechanically on the bridle—as if to head him away from the spot; but this was impossible: another log, overlapping the first, formed an avenue into which the horse had backed, so narrow as to leave not the slightest chance of his turning in it! There was no way of his getting from between the two trunks, but by going straight forward or backward. Forward he *dared not go;* and backward he was moving, as fast as the nature of the ground would permit: now halting with his hips against one of the logs; then with a quick rush backward against the other, that, but for the support thus obtained, would have brought him upon his haunches!

The retrograde movement on the part of the horse was evi

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dently the result of terror, at sight of some object in front. It was aided also by the half-mechanical action of the rider; who dragging continuously on the bridle, and repeating her cries for help, appeared equally suffering from affright!

My astonishment was of short duration. Effect and cause came under my eye almost at the same instant. The latter I saw upon the log in hideous form—the form of a *cougar*.

Slowly advancing along the dead wood—not by bounds or paces, but with the stealthy tread of a cat—his long red body stretched out to its full extent, the beast more resembled a gigantic caterpillar than a quadruped. I could scarcely detect the movement of his limbs, so closely did the monster crawl; but his great tail, tapering three feet behind him, was seen vibrating from side to side, or at intervals moving with quick jerks; expressive of the enjoyment he was receiving in the contemplation of his prey—for such he deemed the affrighted maiden before him.

I saw not the cougar's face—hideous sight at such a moment, nor yet his eyes. Both were turned from me, and fixed steadfastly upon his intended victim.

The fierce beast did not perceive my approach: perhaps a fortunate circumstance. Once or twice I saw him pause, as if crouching for the spring. Luckily, the old horse, making a fresh retrogression, caused him again to advance along the log, in the same creeping attitude as before.

With a glance, I had comprehended the situation; indeed, at the first glance I understood it perfectly.

My delay in acting, only arose from the necessity of preparing for action; and that did not take long.

It was habitual with me to carry my rifle over my shoulder, or rested across the pommel of my saddle: in either case, always in hand. It was but the work of a moment to get the piece ready.

The pressure of the muzzle against my horse's ear, was a signal

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well understood; and at once rendered him as immobile as if made of bronze. Many years of practice—during which I had often aimed at higher game—had steeled my nerves and straightened my sight. Both proved sufficiently true for the destruction of the cougar. Quick after the crack, I saw his red body roll back from the log: and, when the smoke thinned off, I could see it writhing upon the ground.

Why the beast had fallen to my side, I could not tell: for he was fairly on the ridge of the dead wood, when I fired. Perhaps, on receiving the shot, he had fancied that it came from the only enemy visible to him; and by an instinct impelling him to escape, had tumbled off in the opposite direction.

I saw he was not yet dead, but wriggling about among the branches. It was clear that the piece of lead had taken the 'spring' out of him. The bullet had passed through his spine, crashing the column in twain.

After playing upon him with my revolving pistol, until I had emptied three or four of its chambers, I had the satisfaction of seeing him give his last spasmodic 'kick.'

* * * * * *

What followed, I leave to the imagination of my reader. Suffice it to say, that the incident proved my friend. The ice of indifference was broken: and I was rewarded for my sleight-of-hand prowess by something more than smiles—by words of praise that rang melodiously in my ear—words of gratitude spoken with the free, innocent *naiveté* of childhood,—revealing, on the part of her who gave utterance to them, a truly grateful heart.

I rode back with my fair protégé across the track of fallen timber—I could have gone with her to the end of the world. The tortuous path hindered me from holding much converse with her; only now and then was there opportunity for a word.

I remember little of what was said—on my side, no doubt, much that was commonplace; but even *her* observations I can recall but confusedly. The power of love was upon me, alike ab

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sorbing both soul and sense—engrossing every thought in the contemplation of the divine creature by my side. I cared not to talk—enough for me to look and listen.

I did not even think of questioning her as to whence she had come. Even her name was neither asked nor ascertained! Whither she was going was revealed only by the accident of conversation.

She was on her way to visit some one who lived on the other side of the creek—some friend of her father. Would that I could have claimed to be her father's friend—his relative—his son!

We reached a ford; it was the crossing-place. The house, to which her visit was intended, stood not far off, on the other side; and I must needs leave her.

Emboldened by what had passed, I caught hold of that little hand. It was a rare liberty; but I was no longer master of myself. There was no resistance; but I could perceive that the tiny fingers trembled at my touch.

* * * * * *

The old horse, with provoking impatience, plunged into the stream; and we parted.

I watched her while crossing the creek. The crystal drops sparkled like pearls upon her naked feet. Some of them, dashed higher by the hoofs of the horse, were sprinkled upon her cheek, and clung to the carmine skin, as if kissing it! I envied those diamond drops!

Lingering upon the bank, I gazed upon her receding form—with my eyes, followed it through the forest aisle; and then, saw it only at intervals, moving like some bright meteor among the trees. At length, by a sudden turning in the path, it was taken from my sight.

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CHAPTER XX.

SWEET AND BITTER.

SLOWLY and reluctantly, I turned back from the stream, and once more entered amid the wreck of the hurricane. Along the sunny path, the flowers appeared to sparkle with a fresher brilliancy, imbuing the air with sweet odours, wafted from many a perfumed chalice; the birds sang with clearer melody; and the hum of the honey-bee rang through the glades more harmoniously than ever. The 'coo-coo-oo' of the doves blending with the love-call of the squirrel, betokened that both were inspired by the tenderest of passions. 'Pensando de amor,' as the Spanish phrase finely expresses it; for at that moment the beautiful words of the southern poet were in my thoughts, and upon my lips:

> Hasta las fieras
> En sus guaridas
> Enternecidas
> Pensan de amor!

Even the fierce beasts in their forest lairs become gentle under the influence of this all-pervading passion.

I rode on slowly and in silence—my whole soul absorbed in the contemplation of that fair being, whose image seemed still before my eyes—palpable as if present. My heart quivered under the influence of a gentle joy. The past appeared bright; the present, happiness itself; the future full of hope. I had found the very 'wilderness-home' of my longings; the fair spirit that should be my minister! No doubt arose before my mind to dim the brilliant prospect before me—no shadow hung upon the horizon of my hopes. The prospect before me appeared bright and sunny

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as the sky over my head. Within, and without, the world was smiling—all nature seemed tinted with the hue of the rose!

This delightful reverie lasted for some time—alas! too short a time—only while I was traversing the track, that, but the moment before, I had passed over in such pleasant companionship.

On arriving at the scene of my late adventure, a turn was given to my thoughts. It had been a scene of triumph, and deserved commemoration. The body of the panther lay across the path. His shining skin was a trophy not to be despised; and, dismounting on the spot, with my hunting-knife I secured it. I could point to it with pride—as the first spoil obtained in my new hunting-field; but I should prize it still more, as the memento of a far sweeter sentiment.

In a few minutes, it was folded up, and strapped over the cantle of my saddle; and, with this odd addition to my equipage, I once more plunged into the forest path.

For the next mile, the trace led through heavy bottom timber—such as we had traversed, after leaving the settlement of Swampville. The black earth, of alluvial origin, was covered deeply with decayed vegetation; and the tracks of horses and cattle had converted the path into mud. At intervals, it was intersected by embayments of wet morass—the projecting arms of a great swamp, that appeared to run parallel with the creek. Through these, my horse, unused to such footing, passed with difficulty—often floundering up to his flanks in the mud. Though it was but the hour of noon, it more resembled night, or the late gloaming of twilight—so dark were the shadows under this umbrageous wood. As if to strengthen the illusion, I could hear the cry of the bittern, and the screech of the owl, echoing through the aisles of the forest—sounds elsewhere suggestive of night and darkness.

Now and then, light shone upon the path—the light that indicates an opening in the forest; but it was not that of the friendly clearing. Only the break caused by some dismal lagoor

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amidst whose dank, stagnant waters even the cypress cannot grow—the habitat of black water-snakes and mud turtles; of cranes, herons, and qua birds. Hundreds of these I saw perched upon the rotting half-submerged trunks—upon the cypress 'knees' that stood like brown obelisks around the edge; or winging their slow flight through the murky gloom, and filling the air with their deafening screams.

On both sides of the trace towered gigantic trees, flanked at their bases with huge projections, that appeared like the battlements of a fortress. These singular protuberances arose far above the height of my horse—radiating from the trunks on every side, and often causing the path to take a circuitous direction. In the deep gloom, the track would have been difficult to follow, but for an occasional blaze appearing upon the smooth bark of the sycamores.

The scene was by no means suggestive of pleasant reflections—the less so, since I had ascertained, from my host of yesternight, that the greatest portion of Section No. 9 was of just such a character; and that there was scarcely a spot upon it fit for a 'homestead,' except the one already occupied!

'Such an "encumbrance" on my estate,' reflected I, 'is worse than the *heaviest mortgage;*' and I should have been willing at that moment to part with the timber at a very 'low valuation.' But I well knew the value of such a commodity. On the Thames or Mersey, a mine of wealth—on Mud Creek, it would not have been taken as a gift!

My spirits fell as I rode forward—partly influenced by the sombre scenes through which I was passing—partly by the natural reaction which ever follows the hour of sweet contentment—and partly, no doubt, from some unpleasant presentiments that were once mere shaping themselves in my mind. Up to this time, I had scarcely given thought to my errand, or its object. First the gay hues of the morning, and then the romantic incidents of the hour, had occupied my thoughts, and hindered me

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from dwelling on future plans or purposes. Now, however, as I was coming close to the clearing of the squatter, I began to feel that I was *approaching a crisis.*

CHAPTER XXI.

A RUDE RESPONSE.

An opening of about two acres in extent, of irregular semicircular shape, with the creek for its chord, and a worm-fence zigzagging around its arc—scarcely a clearing, since trees bleached and barkless stand thickly over it; a log shanty with clapboard roof, in the centre of the concavity, flanked on one side by a rude horse-shed, on the other, by a corn-crib of split rails; all three—shed, shanty, and crib—like the tower of Pisa, threatening to tumble down; near the shanty, a wood-pile, with an old axe lying upon the chop-block; by the shed and crib, a litter of white 'shucks' and 'cobs;' in front, among the stumps and girdled trees, a thin straggle of withered corn-stalks, shorn of their leafy tops—some standing, some trampled down. Such was the picture before my eyes, as, with my horse, breast up against the fence, I looked into the clearing of squatter Holt.

It must be the place—*my* place? there was no other clearing within miles. My directions had been given with exact minuteness of detail. I had followed them to the letter: I could not be mistaken? I had reached Holt's Clearing at last.

I had ridden quite up to the fence, but could see no gate. A set of bars, however, between two roughly mortised uprights, indicated the entrance of the enclosure.

The top bar was out. Not feeling inclined to dismount, I sprang my horse over the others, and trotted forward in front of the shanty.

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The door stood wide open, and I had hopes that the sound of my horse's hoof-stroke would have brought some one into it; but no one came.

Was there nobody within? I waited for a minute or more, listening for some sign of life in the interior of the cabin; but no voice reached me—no sound of any one stirring!

Perhaps the cabin was empty? Not untenanted: since I could see the signs of occupation, in some articles of rude furniture visible inside the doorway.

Perhaps its inmates had gone out for a moment, and might be in the woods, near at hand?

I looked around the clearing, and over the fence into the forest beyond. No one to be seen! no one to be heard! Without the cabin, as within, reigned a profound silence. Not a living thing in sight—save the black vultures—a score of which, perched on the dead-woods overhead, and fetid as their food, were infecting the air with their carrion odour. Although within easy range of my rifle, the foul birds took no heed of my movements; but sat still, indolently extending their broad wings to the sun—now and then one coming, one going, in slow silent flight—their very shadows seeming to flit lazily among the withered maize-plants that covered the ground.

I had no desire to appear rude. I already regretted having leaped my horse over the bars: even that might be regarded as rather a brusque method of approach to a private dwelling; but I was in hopes it would not be noticed—since there appeared to be no one who had witnessed it.

I coughed and made other noises, with like unfruitful result. My demonstrations were either not heard, or if heard, unheeded.

'Certainly,' thought I, 'if there be any one in the house, they must not only hear, but *see* me;' for although there was no window, I could perceive that the logs were but poorly 'chinked; and from within the house, the whole clearing must have been in sight. Nay, more, the interior itself was visible

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from without—at least the greater part of it—and, while making this observation, I fancied I could trace the outlines of a human figure through the insterstices of the logs! I became convinced it was a human figure, and furthermore, the figure of a man.

It was odd he had not heard me! Was he asleep? No; that could not be—from the attitude in which he was. He appeared to be seated in a chair, but with his body erect, and his head held aloft. In such position, he could scarcely be asleep?

After making this reflection, I coughed again, and louder than before; but to no better purpose! I thought the figure moved: I was sure it moved; but still with no sign of stirring from the seat!

'Cool indifference!' thought I—'what can the fellow mean?'

I grew impatient; and, feeling a little provoked at the inexplicable somnolency of the owner of the cabin, I determined to try whether my voice might not rouse him.

'Ho! house, there!' I shouted, though not loudly; 'ho!—holloa!—any one within?'

Again the figure moved—but still stirred not from its seat!

I repeated both my summons and query—this time in a louder and more commanding tone; and this time I obtained a response!

'Who the h—l *air* you?' came a voice through the interstices of the logs—a voice that more resembled the growl of a bear, than the articulation of a human throat.

'Who the h—l air you, anyhow?' repeated the voice, while, at the same time, I could perceive the figure rising erect from the chair.

I made no answer to the rough query: I saw that my last summons had been sufficient: I could hear the hewn floor-planks cracking under a heavy boot; and knew from this, that my questioner was passing towards the door.

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In another instant, he stood in the doorway—his body filling it from side to side, from head to stoop.

A fearful-looking man was before me—a man of gigantic stature, with a beard reaching to the second button of his coat; and above it a face, not to be looked upon without a sensation of terror: a countenance expressive of determined courage, but, at the same time, of ferocity, untempered by any trace of a softer emotion. A shaggy sand-coloured beard, slightly grizzled; eyebrows like a *chevaux-de-frise* of hogs' bristles; eyes of a greenish-grey, with a broad livid scar across the left cheek, were component parts in producing this expression; while a red cotton kerchief, wound, turban-like, around the head, and pulled low down in front, rendered it more palpable and pronounced

A loose coat of thick green blanket, somewhat faded and worn, added to the colossal appearance of the man; while a red flannel shirt served him also for a vest. His large limbs were inserted in pantaloons of blue Kentucky *jeans* cloth; but these were scarcely visible, hidden by the skirt of the ample blanket-coat that draped down below the tops of a pair of rough horseskin boots reaching above the knee, and into which the trousers had been tucked.

The face of the man was a singular picture; the colossal stature rendered it more striking; the costume corresponded; and all were in keeping with the rude manner of my reception.

It was idle to ask the question. From the description given me by the young backwoodsman, I knew the man before me to be Hickman Holt the squatter.

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CHAPTER XXII.

A ROUGH RECEPTION.

For fashion's sake, I was about to utter the usual formula; 'Mr. Holt, I presume?' but the opportunity was not allowed me. No sooner had the squatter appeared in his doorway, than he followed up his blasphemous interrogatory with a series of others couched in language equally rude.

'Wha's all this muss about? Durn yer stinkin' imperence! who are ye? an' what are ye arter?'

'I wish to see Mr. Holt,' I replied, struggling hard to keep my temper.

'Ye wish to see Mister Holt? Thur's no *Mister* Holt 'bout hyar.'

'No?'

'No! durnation, no! Didn't ye hear me?'

'Do I understand you to say that Hickman Holt does not live here?'

'You understand me to say no sich thing. Ef 't's Hick Holt you mean, he diz live hyar.'

'Hick Holt—yes—that is the name.'

Wal! what o' 't, ef 't is?'

'I wisn to see him.'

'Lookee hyar, strenger!' and the words were accompanied by a significant look; 'ef yar the shariff, Hick Holt aint at home—ye understand me? *he aint at home.*'

The last phrase was rendered more emphatic, by the speaker, as he uttered it, raising the flap of his blanket-coat, and exhibiting a huge bowie-knife stuck through the waistband of his trousers. I understood the hint perfectly.

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'I am not the sheriff,' I answered in an assuring tone.

I was in hopes of gaining favour by the declaration: for I fancied that my bizarre reception might be owing to some error of this kind.

'I am *not* the sheriff,' I repeated impressively.

'Yar not the shariff? One o' his constables, then, I s'pose?'

'Neither one nor other,' I replied, pocketing the affront.

'An' who air ye, anyhow—wi' yar dam glitterin' buttons, an' yar waist drawd in, like a skewered skunk?'

This was intolerable; but remembering the advice of my Nashville friend—with some additional counsel I had received over-night—I strove hard to keep down my rising choler.

'My name,' said I ——

'Durn yar name!' exclaimed the giant, interrupting me; 'I don't care a dog-gone for yar name: tell me yar bizness—that's what I wanter know.'

'I have already told you my business: I wish to see Mr. Holt—Hick Holt, if you like.'

'To *see* Hick Holt? Wal, ef that's all yar bizness, you've *seed* him; an' now ye kin go.'

This was rather a literal interpretation of my demand; but, without permitting myself to be *nonplussed* by it, or paying any heed to the abrupt words of dismissal, I replied, half interrogatively:

'You, then, are he? You are Hick Holt, I suppose?'

'Who said I ain't—durn yer imperence? Now then! what d'ye want wi' me?'

The filthy language, the insulting tone in which it was uttered, the bullying manner of the man—evidently relying upon his giant strength, and formidable aspect—were rapidly producing their effect upon me; but in a manner quite contrary to that anticipated by Master Holt. It was no doubt his design to awe me; but he little knew the man he had to deal with. Whether it might be called courage or not, I was just as reckless of life

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as he. I had exposed my person too often, both in single combat and on the battle-field, to be cowed by a bully—such as I fancied this fellow to be—and the spirit of resistance was fast rising within me. His dictatorial style was unendurable; and discarding all further prudential considerations, I resolved to submit to it no longer.

I did not give way to idle recrimination. Perhaps, thought I, a firm tone may suit my purpose better; and in my reply, I adopted it.

Before I could answer his question, however, he had repeated it in a still more peevish and impatient manner—with an additional epithet of insult.

'Wal, Mister Jaybird,' said he, 'be quick 'bout it! What d' ye want wi' *me*?'

'In the first place, Mr. Hickman Holt, I want civil treatment from you; and secondly'——

I was not permitted to finish my speech. I was interrupted by an exclamation—a horrid oath—that came fiercely hissing from the lips of the squatter.

'Durnation!' cried he; 'you be d——d! Civil treetmint i'deed! You're a putty fellur to talk o' civil treetmint, arter jumpin' yar hoss over a man's fence, an' ridin' slap-jam inter his door, 'ithout bein asked! Let me tell yer, Mister Gilt Buttons, I don't 'low any man—white, black, or Injun—to enter *my* clarin' 'ithout fust knowin' his reezun. Ye hear that d'ye?'

'*Your* clearing! Are you sure it is *yours*?'

The squatter turned red upon the instant. Rage may have been the passion that brought the colour to his cheeks; but I could perceive that my words had produced another emotion in his mind, which added to the hideousness of the cast at that moment given to his features.

'Not my clarin'!' he thundered, with the embellishment of another imprecation—'not my clarin'! Show me the man, who

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says it's not!—show 'm to me! By the Almighty Etarnal, he wont say 't twice!'

'Have you *purchased* it?'

'Neer a mind for that, mister; I've *made* it: that's my style o' purchase, an', by G—! it 'll stan' good, I reck'n. Consarn yar skin! what hev you got to do wi 't, anyhow?'

'This,' I replied, still struggling to keep calm, at the same time taking the title-deeds from my saddle-bags—'this only, Mr Holt. That your house stands upon Section No. 9; that I have bought that section from the United States government; and must therefore demand of you, either to use your *preëmption right*, or deliver the land over to me. Here is the government grant! you may examine it, if you feel so inclined.'

An angry oath was the response, or rather a volley of oaths.

'I thort that war yar bizness,' continued the swearer; 'I thort so; but jest this time you 've kim upon a fool's errand. Durn yar government grant! durn yar preëmption right! an' durn yar title-papers too! I don't valley them more'n them thar corn shucks—*I* don't. I've got *my* preëmption dockyment inside hyar. I 'll jest shew you that, mister; an' see how ye'll like it.'

The speaker turned back into his cabin, and for a moment I lost sight of him.

'Preëmption document!' he said. Was it possible he had purchased the place, and was gone to fetch his title-deeds? If so——

My reflection was cut short. In another moment he reappeared in the doorway; not with any papers in his hand—but, instead, a long rifle, that, with its butt resting on the door-stoop, stood almost as high as himself!

'Now, Mister Turn-me-out!' said he, speaking in a satirical triumphant tone, and raising the piece in front of him, 'thar's my title—*my* preëmption right's the right o' the rifle. *It's* clar enuf ye'll acknowledge that, won't ye?'

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'No,' I replied in a firm voice.

'Ye won't? the h—l, ye won't? Look hyar, stranger! I'm in airnest. Look in my eye, an' see if I ain't! I gi' ye warnin' then, that ef ye're not out o' this clarin' in six jumps o' a squ'll, you'll niver go out o' it a livin' man. You see that ere stump? Its shadder's jest a creepin' up to the house: the minnit that shadder touches the wall, I'll shoot you down, as sure's my name's Hick Holt. Mind, I've gin ye warnin'!'

'And I give you warning, Mr. Holt, that I am prepared to defend myself; and if you miss' ——

'Miss!' ejaculated he, with a contemptuous toss of the head —'miss, ye fool! thar's no fear o' that.'

'If you miss,' continued I, without heeding the interruption, 'I shall show you no mercy. If you are going to take the cowardly advantage of having the first shot, I have my advantage too. In self-defence, I shall be justified in killing you; and if you fire at me, I shall certainly do so. Be warned! I never spare a coward.'

'Coward!' exclaimed the colossus, with an imprecation that was horrible to hear.

'An' how ef I don't miss?' continued he, apparently calming his rage, and speaking with a significant sneer—intended to awe me, by insinuating the certainty of his aim. 'How ef I don't miss, Mister Popgun?'

'You may, for all that. Don't be too sure of hitting—I've been shot at before now.'

'You'll niver be shot at *arter* now, ceptin' you leave this clarin'. One crack from my gun'll be enuf for ye, I reck'n.'

'I'll take my chance. If it should go against me, *you* won't gain by it. Remember, my good man, it's not a duel we're fighting. You have chosen to attack me; and if I should fall in the affair, I've faith enough in the law to believe it will avenge me.'

I fancied that my speech produced some effect upon the fel

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ow, and seeing that he remained silent, I followed it up by words of similar import:

'If it be my fate to fall, I leave behind me friends who will inquire into the affair of my death. Trust me, they will do so! If I kill you, it will be but justifiable homicide: and will be so adjudged; while your killing me will be regarded in a different light—it will be pronounced *murder!*'

I gave full emphasis to the last word. On hearing it, my antagonist showed signs of emotion. I fancied I saw him tremble, and turn slightly pale. With an unsteady voice, he replied:

'Murder? No, no! I've gin ye warnin' to go. Ye've time enuf yet to save yerself. Git out o' the clarin', an' thar'll be no harm done ye!'

'I shall not go out of the clearing, until you've acknowledged my claim.'

'Then you'll niver go out o' it alive—I swar it by G—! niver!'

'You are determined, then, to be my *murderer?*'

I again pronounced the word in the most emphatic tone. I saw that it affected him in some singular way: whether through a fear of consequences, or that there still lingered in his heart some spark of humanity; or, perhaps—but least probable of all—he was beginning to be ashamed of his foul play. By which of those three motives, or by what other inspired, I could not guess; but he seemed to cower under the imputation.

'Murderer!' echoed he, after a moment of apparent reflection. 'No, no; it's bad enuf to hev the blame o' that, 'ithout bein' guilty o't. I ain't agwine to *murder* ye; but I ain't agwine neyther to let ye go. I mout a did so a minnit agone, but ye've lost yer chance. Ye've called me *coward*, an' by the Etarnal! no man 'll say that word o' Hick Holt, an' live to boast o't. No, mister! ye 've got to die; and ye may get yerself ready 'or 't, 's soon 's ye like Coward, i'deed!"

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I repeat it—your act is cowardly.'

'What act?'

'Unprovoked attack upon me—especially since it gives you the first shot. What if I were to shoot you down now? With the pistol you see in my holster here, I could send six bullets through your body, before you could bring your rifle to your shoulder. What would you call that? Sheer cowardice, would it not be? and murder too.'

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DUEL WITHOUT SECONDS.

While I was speaking, I saw a change pass over the countenance of my colossal antagonist—as if some new resolve was forming in his mind, that affected the programme he had already laid out. Was it possible I had touched him on a point of honour? It was this purpose I desired to effect; and, though hopeless it might appear, I continued the only kind of appeal that, with such a spirit, seemed to promise any chance of success.

'You *dare* not play fair in this game?' I said, banteringly. 'You *are* a coward; and would murder me! You want the first shot; you know you do?"

'It's a lie!' cried the colossus, raising himself to his full height, and assuming an air of chivalric grandeur I could not have deemed him capable of—'it's a lie! I don't wish to murder ye, an' I don't want the first shot neyther.'

'How?'

'I hain't so little confidence in my shootin' as to care for you and yar jim-crack gun! Nor is Hick Holt in such consate wi' his life eyther, that he's afeerd to risk it. Tho' ye air a stuck-up critter, I won't gi' ye the opportunity to 'kuse me of foul

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play. Thar's grit in ye, I reck'n; an' seein' that's made me change my mind.'

'What!' I exclaimed, taken by surprise at the speech, and fancying it promised an end to our altercation—'you have changed your mind! you mean to act justly then?'

'I mean, it shall be a *fair stan'-up fight* atween us.'

'Oh! a duel?"

'Duel, or whatever else ye may call it, mister.'

'I agree to that. But how about seconds?'

"D'ye think two men can't fight fair 'ithout seconds? Ye see yonner stump standin' nigh the bars?'

'Yes—I see it.'

'Wal, mister, thar you'll take yar stand—ahind or afront o' it, whichsomever ye like best. Hyar's this other un, clost by the crib—thar'll be my place. Thar's twenty yards atween 'em, I reck'n. Is that yar distance?'

'It will do as well as any other,' I replied mechanically—still under the influence of surprise not unmingled with a sentiment of admiration.

'Dismount, then! Take yar pouch an' flask along wi' ye—ye see I have got myen? One shot at ye's all *I'll* want, I reck'n. But ef thar shed be a miss, look out for quick loadin'! An' mind, mister! thar's one o' us 'll never leave this clarin' alive.'

'About the first shot? Who is to give the signal?'

'I've thort o' that a'ready. It'll be all right, I promise ye.'

'In what way can you arrange it?'

'This way: Thar's a hunk o' deer-meat in the house: I mean to fetch that out, an' chuck it over thar, into the middle o' the clarin'. Ye see them buzzarts up thar on the dead-woods?'

I nodded in the affirmative.

'Wal—it won't be long afore one or other o' them flops down to the meat; an' *the first o' 'em that touches ground, that'll be the signal.* That's fair enuf, I reck'n?'

'Perfectly fair,' I replied, still speaking mechanically; for the

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very justness of the proposal rendered my astonishment continuous.

I was something more than astonished at the altered demeanor of the man. He was fast disarming me. The unexpected action had subdued my ire; and all consideration of consequences apart, I now felt a complete disinclination for the combat.

Was it too late to stay our idle strife?

Such was my reflection the moment after; and with an effort conquering my pride, I gave words to the thought.

'Yar too late, mister! 'twont do now,' was the reply to my pacific speech.

'And why not?' I continued to urge; though, to my chagrin, I began to perceive that it *was* an idle effort.

'Yuv riz my dander; an', by G—! yuv got to fight for it!'

'But surely'——

'Stop yar palaver! By the tarnal airthquake, I'll gin to think *you* air a coward! I thort ye'd show the white feather afore 'twar all over!'

'Enough!' cried I, stung by the taunt; 'I am ready for you one way or the other. Go on.'

The squatter once more entered his cabin, and soon came out again, bringing forth the piece of venison.

'Now!' cried he, 'to yar stand! an' remember! neyther fires *till a bird lights on the groun'*. Arter that, ye may go it like blazes!'

'Stay!' said I; 'there is something yet to be done. You are acting honourably in this affair; which I acknowledge is more than I was led to expect. You deserve one chance for your life; and if I should fall, it will be in danger. You would be regarded as a murderer; and that must not be.'

'What is't you mean?' hurriedly interrogated my antagonist, evidently not comprehending my words.

Without answering to the interrogatory, I drew out my pocket-book; and, turning to a blank leaf of the memorandum, wrote upon it: '*I have fallen in fair fight.*'

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I appended the date; signed my name; and, tearing out the leaf, handed it to my adversary.

He looked at it for a moment, as if puzzled to make out what was meant. He soon saw the intention, as I could tell by the grim smile.

'You're right thar!' said he, in a drawling tone, and after a pause. 'I hedn't thunk o' that. I guess this dockyment 'll be nothin' the wuss o' my name too? What's sauce for the goose, air likewise sauce for the gander. Yar pencil, ef ye pleeze? I ain't much o' a scholard; but I reck'n I kin write my name. Hyar goes!'

Spreading out the paper on the top of a stump, he slowly scribbled his name below mine; and then, holding the leaf before my eyes, pointed to the signature—but without saying a word.

This done, he replaced the document on the stump; and, drawing his knife, stuck the blade through the paper, and left the weapon quivering in the wood!

All these manœuvres were gone through with a cool composure, as if they were only the prelude to some ordinary purpose!

'I reck'n, strenger,' said he, in the same imperturbable tone, 'that'll keep the wind from blowin' it away, till we've settled who it's to belong to. Now, to yar place! I'm agwine to to throw the deer-meat.'

I had already dismounted, and stood near, rifle in hand. Unresistingly, I obeyed the request; and walked off to the stump that had been designated without saying another word, or even looking around. I had no fear of being shot in the back: for the late behaviour of the man had completely disarmed me of all suspicion of treachery. I had not the slightest fear of his proving a traitor, and no more did I hold him to be a coward. That impression was gone long ago.

I confess, that never with more reluctance did I enter upon the field of fight; and at that moment, had my antagonist

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required it, I should not only have retracted the allegation of cowardice, but, perhaps, have surrendered up my claim to the clearing, though I knew that this could be done only at the expense of my name and honour. Were I to have done so, I could never have shown my face again—neither in the settlement of Swampville nor elsewhere. Even among my polished friends of more fashionable circle, I should have been taunted—branded as a coward and poltroon! The rude character of my adversary would have been no excuse—especially after the manner in which he was acting. 'Backed out' would have been the universal verdict!

Moreover, notwithstanding the apparently calm demeanour the squatter had now assumed—courteous I might almost call it—I knew he was implacable in his determination. There was no alternative—*I must fight!*

I reached the stump; and, turning on my heel, stood facing him. He was already in his place—with the joint of venison in one hand, and his long rifle in the other. The hour was nigh, when one of us should make an abrupt exit from the world!

Such a destiny, for one or other of us, I saw depicted in the impassible face of my adversary—as plainly as if written upon the sky.

I could read there, that there was no chance of escaping the combat; and I resigned myself to meet it.

'Now, mister!' cried my antagonist in a clear, firm voice, 'I'm agwine to chuck the meat. Remember! neyther's to fire till a bird lights on the groun'! Arter that, ye may go to it like h—l!'

I saw him swing the joint once or twice round his head; I saw it hurled aloft, and then whirling through the air; I saw it falling—falling, till the sodden sound told that it had reached the ground.

That was a fearful moment!

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CHAPTER XXIV.

WAITING THE WORD

In truth was it a fearful moment—one to shake the steadiest nerves, or thrill the stoutest heart. To me, it was an ordeal far more terrible than that of an ordinary duel; for there was lacking the motive—at least on my side—which usually stimulates to an affair of honour. Sense of wrong I felt, but too slightly for revenge—not enough to steel the heart to the spilling of blood. Anger I *had* felt but the moment before; and then I could have fought, even to the death; but my blood, that had boiled up for an instant, now ran coldly through my veins. The unexpected behaviour of my adversary had calmed my wrath—acting upon it like oil upon troubled water.

Thus to fight without seconds; to die without friend to speak the last word of worldly adieu; or to take the life of another, without human being to attest the fairness of the act; no earthly eye beholding us; no living creature save the black vultures—appropriate instruments to give the death-signal—ominous witnesses of the dark deed; such were the appalling reflections that came before my mind, as I stood facing my determined antagonist.

It would scarcely be true to say, that I felt not fear; and yet it was less cowardice, than a sort of vague vexation at risking my life in so causeless a conflict. There was something absolutely ludicrous in standing up to be shot at, merely to square with the whim of this eccentric squatter; and to shoot at him seemed equally ridiculous. Either alternative, upon reflection, appeared the very essence of absurdity; and, having ample time

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to reflect, while awaiting the signal, I could not help thinking how farcical was the whole affair.

No doubt, I might have laughed at it, had I been a mere looker on—herald or spectator; but, unfortunately, being a principal in this deadly duetto—a real wrestler in the backwoods arena—the provocative to mirth was given in vain; and only served to heighten the solemnity of the situation.

The circumstances might have elicited laughter; but the contingency, turn whatever way it might, was too serious to admit of levity on my part. Either horn of the dilemma presented a sharp point. To suffer one's-self to be killed in this *sans façon* was little else than suicide—while to kill, smacked strongly of murder!

And one or the other was the probable issue—nay, more than probable: for as I bent my eyes on the resolute countenance of my *vis-à-vis*, I felt certain that there was no chance of escaping from the terrible alternative. He stood perfectly immobile—his long rifle raised to the 'ready,' with its muzzle pointing towards me—and in his eye I could not read the slightest sign, that he wavered in his determination! That grey-green orb was the only member that moved: his body, limbs, and features were still and rigid, as the stump behind which he stood. The eye alone showed signs of life. I could see its glance directed towards three points—in such rapid succession, that it might be said to look 'three ways at once'—to the decoy upon the ground, to the shadowy forms upon the tree, and towards myself—its chief object of surveillance!

'Merciful Heavens! is there no means to avert this doom of dread? Is it an absolute necessity, that I must either kill this colossus, or be myself the victim of his reckless ruth? Is there no alternative? Is there still no chance of an arrangement?'

Hopeless as it appeared, I resolved to make a last effort for peace. Once more I should try the force of an appeal. If he refused to assent to it, my position would be no worse. Better, indeed: since I stood in need of some stimulus to rouse me to an

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attitude, even of defence. This thought swaying me, I called out:

'Holt! you are a brave man. I know it. Why should this go on? It is not too late' ——

'*You* air a coward!' cried he, interrupting me, 'an' I know it —a sneakin' coward, in spite o' yar soger clothes! Shet up yar durned head, or ye'll scare away the birds! an', by the tarnal! ef you do, I'll fire at ye, the fust that takes wing!'

'Let that be the signal, then!' cried I, roused to an impatient indignation by this new insult: '*the first that takes wing!*'

'Agreed!' was the quick rejoinder, delivered in a tone that bespoke determination to abide by it.

My irresolution troubled me no longer. Thus driven to bay, I felt that further forbearance would not only be idle, but dangerous. It was playing with my life, to leave it in the hands of this unrelenting enemy. Better make *him* suffer for his sanguinary folly, than be myself its victim.

Stirred by these thoughts, I grasped my rifle—now for the first time with a determination to make use of it. By the same prompting, my eye became active—watching with resolute regard the movements of the birds, and measuring the ground that separated me from my adversary.

Notwithstanding the sting which his words had inflicted, I was yet hampered by some considerations of mercy. I had no desire to *kill* the man, if I could avoid it. To 'cripple' him would be sufficient.

I had no fear of his having the shot before me. Much practice had given me such adroitness in the *manége* of my weapon, that I could handle it with the quickness and skill of a juggler. Neither did I fear to miss my aim. I had perfect reliance on the sureness of my sight; and, with such a mark as the huge body of the squatter, it was impossible I could miss. In this respect the advantage was mine; and, at so short a distance, I could have insured a fatal shot—had such been my intention

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But it was not; the very contrary was my wish—to draw blood without inflicting a mortal wound. This would perhaps satisfy the honour of my antagonist, and bring our strife to an end.

Whether any such consideration was in his mind, I could not tell. It was not visible in his eye—nor his features, that, through out the whole scene, preserved their stern statue-like rigidity.

There was no help for it—no alternative but to shoot at him, and shoot him down—if possible, only to wing him; but, of course, a sense of my own danger rendered this last of less than secondary importance.

A single exchange of shots would, no doubt, decide the affair: and the advantage would lie to him who was 'quickest on the trigger.'

To obtain this advantage, then, I watched with eager eye the behaviour of the birds. In like manner was my antagonist occupied.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE DUEL DELAYED.

Full five minutes passed, and not one of the vultures showed sign of stirring—five minutes of prolonged and terrible suspense.

It was odd that the birds had not at once swooped down upon the piece of venison; since it lay conspicuously upon the ground—almost under the tree where they were perched! A score of them there were—ranged along the dead limbs—each with an eye keen of sight as an eagle's! Beyond doubt they observed the object—they would have seen it a mile off, and recognised it too—why, then, were they disregarding it—a circumstance so contradictory of their natural instincts and habits, that, even in that dread hour, I remarked its singularity?

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The cause was simple enough; no doubt the birds had glutted themselves elsewhere. Some wild beast of the wood—more likely a straying ox—had fallen a victim to disease and the summer heats; and his carcase had furnished them with their morning's meal. There was evidence of the truth of this in their blood-stained beaks and gorged maws, as also the indolent attitudes in which they roosted—many of them apparently asleep! Others at intervals stretched forth their necks, and half spread their wings; but only to yawn, and catch the cooling breeze Not one of all the listless flock, showed the slightest disposition to take wing.

There were several already in the air, wheeling high aloft; and two or three had just joined their companions, increasing the cluster upon the tree. These had arrived after we had taken our stand; and others were constantly coming down. But the signal mutually agreed to was mutually understood; it was the *departure* of one of the birds—not its *arrival*—that was to give the cue of *entrée* to the tragic act—the signal for the scene of death.

Those five minutes to me appeared fifty—ah! far more than that: for, brief as was the actual time, a world of thoughts passed through my mind during its continuance. The past and future were alike considered. The memory of home, kindred and friends; the probability that all such ties were to be severed now and forever; some regret that laurels lately won were to be so briefly worn; the near prospect of life's termination; of a death inglorious—perhaps scarcely to be recorded; vague visions of a future world; doubts not unmingled with dread about the life to come: such were the thoughts that whirled confusedly through my brain.

And the *proximate* past had also its share in my reflections—perhaps occupying the largest space of all. That thing of light and gold—who but an hour ago had filled my heart to overflowing—was still there, mingling with its last emotions! Was I

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never more to look upon that radiant form? never more behold that face so divinely fair? never more listen to that melodious voice? Never more!

The negative answer to these mental interrogatives—though only conjectural—was the bitterest reflection of all!

Still stir not the vultures: only to preen their black plumes with fetid beak; or, extending their broad wings, to shadow the sunbeam from their bodies. It is the hour of noon; and the sun, shining down from the zenith, permeates the atmosphere with his sultriest rays. The birds droop under the heated caloric. It imbues them with a listless torpor. Carrion itself would scarce tempt them from their perch.

Five minutes have elapsed; and not one moves from the tree—neither to swoop to the earth, nor soar aloft in the air.

I no longer wish them to tarry. The suspense is terrible to endure—the more so from the ominous stillness that reigns around. Since the last angry challenge, not a word has been exchanged between my adversary and myself. In sullen silence, we eye each other, with scintillating glances watching for the signal. * * * *

The situation was more than unpleasant. I longed for the *finale*. My antagonist also showed signs of impatience. No longer preserving his statue-like *pose*, his body began to sway from side to side; while at intervals, he stamped the ground with his heavy heel. From the increasing anger that betrayed itself in his looks, I expected an explosion.

It came at length.

'Durn them buzzarts!' cried he, with a hurried gesture, 'thar a gwine to keep us stannin' hyar till sundown. Durn the sleepy brutes! we can't wait no longer on 'em. I dare ye' ——

The challenge thus commenced was never completed—at all events, I did not hear its conclusion; and know not to this hour what he meant to have proposed. His speech was either interrupted, or his voice drowned, by the shrill neighing of my horse

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- who seemed startled at some sound from the forest. Almost at the same instant, I heard a responsive neigh, as if an echo from behind me.

I heeded neither the one nor the other: I saw that the birds were aroused from their lethargic attitude. Some of them appeared as if pressing upon their limbs to spring upward from the tree. The deadly moment had come!

With my rifle raised almost to the level, I glanced rapidly towards my antagonist. His piece was also raised; but, to my astonishment, he appeared to be grasping it mechanically, as if hesitating to take aim! His glance, too, showed irresolution: instead of being turned either upon myself or the vultures, it was bent in a different direction, and regarding with fixed stare some object behind me!

I was turning to ascertain the cause, when I heard close at hand the trampling of a horse; and, almost at the same instant, an exclamation, uttered in the metallic tones of a woman's voice. This was followed by a wild scream; and simultaneously with its utterance, I beheld a female form springing over the bars! It was a young girl, whom I recognised at a glance, as she I had encountered in the forest!

I had not time to recover from my surprise before the girl had glided past me; and I followed her with my eyes, as she ran rapidly over the space that separated me from the squatter. Still mute with surprise, I saw her fling herself on the breast of my colossal antagonist, at the same time crying out in a tone of passionate entreaty:

'Father, dear father! what has *he* done? Mercy! O mercy!'

'Good God! *her* father? Holt *her* father!'

'Away, Lil!' cried he in a peremptory tone, removing her arms from his neck. 'Away, gurl! git ye gone from hyar!'

'No, father! dear father! you will not? What does it mean? What has *he* done? Why are you angry with *him*?'

'Done, gurl? He's called me *coward;* an' 'ud drive us out o

house an' home. Git you gone, I say! Into the house wi' ye—away!'

'Mercy! O father, have mercy! Do not kill him. He is brave—he is beautiful! If you knew'——

'Brave? beautiful?—gurl, yar ravin'! What do you know about him? Ye've niver seed him afore?'

'Yes, dear father! only an hour ago. If you but knew—it was he who saved me. But for him——Father, he must not—he shall not die?'

'Saved ye? What do ye mean, gurl?'

'Hillo! What's all this rumpus?'

The familiar ejaculation, and its adjunct interrogatory, admonished me that a new personage had appeared upon the scene. The voice came from behind.

On turning, I beheld the unexpected speaker—a man on horseback, who had ridden up to the bars; and, having halted there, was craning his neck into the enclosure—gazing upon the scene that was being enacted there with a singular half-comic, half-satirical expression of countenance!

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PEACEMAKER.

Without knowing why, I hailed the arrival of this stranger as opportune. Perhaps his presence, added to the entreaties of that fair young creature—still urgent in my behalf—might prevent the effusion of blood. Indeed, I had already determined that none should be spilled by *me*—let the consequences be as they might; and whatever was to be the *dénouement* of this awkward affair, I resolved that my rifle should have nought to do in deciding it. The piece had fallen to the 'order arms;' the ill

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omened birds had forsaken their perch; and, now soaring in the blue sky, almost beyond the reach of human vision, their movements were no longer heeded—either by my adversary or myself.

Turning away from the stranger—whom I had only regarded for a second or two—I faced again to the more interesting tableau in front of me. That, too, was rapidly undergoing a change. The squatter no longer clung to his rifle: the girl had taken it from his hands, and was hurrying with it into the door of the cabin. There was no hindrance made by my antagonist! on the contrary, he appeared to have delivered it over to her—as if the affair between us was to have a pacific termination, or at all events, a respite.

What surprised me more than all was the altered demeanor of my adversary. His whole manner seemed to have undergone a sudden change. Sudden it must have been; since it had taken place during the second or two, while my attention was occupied by the newly arrived horseman. What still further astonished me was, that this transformation was evidently produced by the presence of the stranger himself!

That it was not due to the young girl's interference, I had evidence already. That had not moved him for a moment. Her earnest appeal had received a repulse—energetic and decisive as it was rude; and of itself would certainly not have saved me.

Beyond doubt, then, was I indebted to the stranger for the truce so unexpectedly entered upon.

The change in Holt's demeanour was not more sudden than complete. At first, an air of astonishment had been observable; after that, an expression of inquietude—becoming each moment more marked. No longer did he exhibit the proud aspect of a man who felt himself master of the ground; but, on the contrary, appeared cowed and quailing in the presence of the new-comer—whom he had met at the entrance, and at once invited into the cabin. This manner was observable in the half-mechanical courtesy, with which he removed the bars, and took hold of the

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stranger's horse; as also in some phrases of welcome to which he gave utterance in my hearing.

For myself, I was no longer regarded—any more than if I had been one of the deadwoods that stood around the clearing. The squatter passed without even looking at me—his whole attention seemingly absorbed by the new arrival.

It was natural I should regard with curiosity an individual whose presence had produced such a wonderful effect; and my scrutinising gaze may have appeared rude enough to him.

I cannot say that he elicited my admiration. On the contrary, his appearance produced an opposite effect. I beheld him with what might be termed an instinct of repulsion: since I could assign no precise reason for the dislike with which he had inspired me on sight.

He was a man of about thirty years of age; of a thin spare body, less than medium height; and features slightly marked with the *bar* sinister. A face without beard—skin of cadaverous hue—nose sharply pointed—chin and forehead both receding—eyes small, but sparkling like those of a ferret—and long lank black hair, thinly shading his cheeks and brows—were the prominent characteristics of this man's portrait.

His dress was of a clerical cut and colour—though not of the finest fabric. The coat, trousers, and vest, were of black broadcloth—the coat and waistcoat being made with standing collars, similar in style to those worn by Wesleyan ministers—or more commonly by Catholic priests—while a white cravat, not over clean, and a hat with curving boat-brim, completed the saint character of the costume.

Judging from his personal appearanae, I concluded that I saw, in the individual before me, the Methodist minister of Swampville. If so, it would account for the obsequiousness of his host, though not satisfactorily. There was something more than obsequiousness in Holt's manner—something altogether different from that deferential respect, with which the gospel minister is

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usually received in the houses of the humbler classes. Moreover, the character of the squatter—such as I had heard it, and such as I had myself observed it—bore no correspondence with the attitude of reverence he had so suddenly assumed. Even under the hypothesis, that the new-comer was his clergyman, I was puzzled by his behaviour.

He in the ecclesiastical costume appeared to be a man of few words; and of gesture he made a like limited use—having passed me without even the courtesy of a bow. On the contrary, I was honoured with a glance of cynical regard—so palpable in its expression, as to cause an itching in my fingers, notwithstanding the saintly gown. I contented myself, however, with returning the glance, by one I intended to bear a like contemptuous expression, and, with this exchange, we separated from each other.

I remained by my stand without offering remark, either to the squatter or his guest. The only change I effected in my position was to sit down upon the stump—where, with my rifle between my knees, I resolved to await the issue.

All idea of using the weapon was gone out of my mind—at least, against Hickman Holt. He was *her* father: I would as soon have thought of turning its muzzle to my own body.

I tarried, therefore, with no hostile intention. On the contrary, I only waited for an opportunity to propose some pacific arrangement of our difficulty; and my thoughts were now directed to this end.

I had every chance of observing the movements of the two men: since, instead of entering the cabin, they had stopped in front of it—where they at once became engaged in conversation. I took it for granted that I was myself the subject; but, after a time, I began to fancy that I was mistaken. Judging from the earnest manner of both—but more especially from Holt's gestures and frequent ejaculations—something of still greater interest appeared to be the theme of their dialogue. I saw the squatter's face suddenly brighten up—as if some new and joyous

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revelation had been made to him; while the features of his visitor bore the satisfied look of one who was urging an argument with success.

They were evidently talking of some topic beyond my affair and unconnected with it; but what it could be, I was unable even to guess. Perhaps had I listened more attentively, I might have arrived at some knowledge of it—since words were occasionally uttered aloud—but my eyes were busier than my ears; and at that moment, neither the squatter nor his guest was the object of my thought. Beyond them was the attraction that fascinated my gaze—that thing of roseate golden hue, whose shining presence seemed to light up the dark interior of the cabin—gleaming meteor-like through the interstices of the logs—now softly moving from side to side, and now, thank Heaven! gliding towards the door!

Only for a moment stood she silently on the stoop—one smiling moment, and she was gone. Her fair face was once more hidden, behind the rude *jalousie* of the logs; but the smile remained. It was mine; and lingered long within the trembling temple of my heart.

CHAPTER XXVII.

YES—YES!

Towards the interior of the hut, hallowed by such lovely presence, I continued to direct my glances—with an occasional side-look, noting the movements of the two men. Whatever had been the exciting topic of discourse but the moment before, I saw that it was now changed; and that I was now myself the subject of their conversation. This I could tell by their looks and gestures—evidently bearing upon me and my affair.

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Conscious that I was observing them—and as if desirous of conferring more privately—they passed round to the rear of the cabin; where for the time they were out of my sight as well as hearing. So far from regretting this movement, it was just what I desired: it left me free to continue the pleasant espionage in which I had engaged.

Now more boldly my eyes explored the dark interior of the hut—more freely roamed my glance along the interstices of the logs. Gladly should I have gone up to the doorway—fain would I have been to enter—had I not been restrained; but delicacy, and something more, stood in the way; and I was forced to keep my ground.

Again I saw the bright form flitting within. Gliding gently across the floor—as if on tip-toe, and by stealth—the young girl paused for a while near the back-wall of the cabin. Close behind this, the two men were conversing. Did she go there to listen? She might easily hear what was said: I could myself distinguish the voices, and almost the words. She remained motionless; and, as well as I could judge, in an attitude of attention—her head lowered, and her body slightly bent forward

I was forming conjectures as to her motive, when I saw her moving away from the spot. In another instant, she appeared in the doorway—this time evidently with some design, as her manner and attitude betokened. For a moment, she stood upon the stoop, fronting towards me, but with her face averted, and her eyes by a side-glance directed towards the rear of the hut. She appeared to look and listen—as if noting the position of the men; and then, seemingly satisfied that she was not her self observed, she suddenly faced round, and came gliding towards me!

Taken by surprise—a surprise mingled with sweet satisfaction—I rose to my feet; and stood silently but respectfully awaiting her approach.

I had acted with prudence in not speaking; for I saw by her

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manner that the movement was a stolen one. Moreover, the finger, raised for an instant to her lips, admonished me to silence I understood the signal, so piquantly given; and obeyed it.

In another instant, she was near—near enough for me to hear her words—delivered in a half-whisper. She had paused before me in an attitude that betokened the fear of interruption; and, before speaking, she cast behind her another of those unquiet looks.

'Brave stranger!' said she, in a hurried undertone, 'I know you are not afraid of my father; but oh, sir! for mercy's sake, do not fight with him!'

'For *your* sake,' I said, interrupting her, and speaking in a low but impressive tone—'for your sake, fair Lilian, I shall not fight with him. Trust me, there is no fear. I shall bear anything, rather than'——

'Hush!' said she, again motioning me to silence, at the same time glancing furtively behind her. 'You must not speak: you may be heard! Only listen to me. I now know why you are here. I came out to tell you something.'

'I listen.'

'Father does not now wish to quarrel with you: he has changed his mind. I have just heard what they said. He intends to make you a proposal. Oh, sir! if you can, please agree to it; for then there would be no trouble. I hope there will be none!'

'For you, fair Lilian, I shall agree to it—whatever the conditions be. Can you tell me what proposal he intends making me?"

'I heard him say he would *sell*—— Oh, mercy! they are coming—if I am seen'——

The murmuring words were drowned by the louder voices of the men—who were now heard returning round the angle of the wall. Fortunately, before they had reached the front of the cabin, the young girl had glided back into the doorway; and

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no suspicion appeared to be entertained by either, of the clandestine visit just paid me.

On rounding the corner, the stranger stopped; while the squatter continued to advance, until within a few paces of where I stood. Then pausing, he erected his gigantic form to its full height; and, for a moment, confronted me without speaking. I noticed that his countenance no longer bore signs of angry passion; but, on the contrary, betrayed some traces of a softer feeling—as of regret and contrition.

'Strenger!' said he, at length, 'I've two things to propose to ye; an' ef you'll agree to them, thur's no need why you an' I shed quarrel—leest of all plug one another wi' bullets, as we wur agwine to do the minnit ago.'

'Name your conditions!' rejoined I, 'and if they are not impossible for me to accept, I promise you they shall be agreed to.'

With Lilian in my thoughts, they would be hard, indeed, if I could not square with whatever terms he might propose.

'They ain't unpossible—neyther o' 'em; thur only just an' fair.

'Let me hear them—believe me, Hickman Holt, I shall judge them most liberably.'

'Fust, then, you called me a coward. Do you take that back?'

'Willingly I do?'

'So fur good; an' now for the tother proposal I hev to make. I don't acknowledge yar right to this clarin'. I've made it; an' call it my own, as a sovereign citizen of these United States; an' I don't care a cuss for preëmption right, since I don't believe in any man's right to move me off o' it. But I ain't so durned partickler 'bout this hyar bit o' groun'. Another 'll answer my bizness equally as well—maybe better—an' ef ye'll pay me for my *improvements*, ye can take both clarin' an' cabin, an' hev no more muss about it. Them's my proposals.'

'How much do you expect for these improvements? At what sum do you value them?'

trembled, as I awaited the answer. My poor purse felt light

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as it lay against my bosom—far lighter than the heart within though that had been heavier but an hour before. I knew that the sack contained less than two hundred dollars, in notes of the Planters' Bank; and I feared that such a sum would never satisfy the expectations of the squatter.

'Wal, strenger,' replied he, after a pause, 'thur worth a good wheen o' dollars; but I shan't valley them myself. I'll leave that part o' the bizness to a third individooal—my friend as stands thur; an' who's a just man, an's been some'at o' a lawyer too. He'll say what's fair atween us. Won't you, Josh?'

I thought this rather a familiar style of address, on the part of the squatter, towards his clerical and saint-like friend; but I refrained from showing my astonishment.

'Oh, yes,' replied the other, 'I'll value the property with pleasure—that is, if the gentleman desires me to do so.'

'How much do you think it worth?' I inquired with painful anxiety.

'Well, I should say that, for the improvements Mr. Holt has made, a hundred dollars would be a fair price.'

'A hundred dollars?'

'Yes—in cash, of course, I mean.'

'Will you be satisfied with that sum?' said I, turning to Holt for the answer.

'Parfitly satisfied—so long's it's in cash.'

'I agree to give it then.'

'All right, strenger! a bargain's a bargain. You kin shell out the dollars; an' I'll give you possession afore this gentleman—who'll witness it in writin', ef you like.

'I want no writing. I can trust to your word.'

It was no flattery: I felt at the moment that the squatter—rudely as he had acted—was still possessed of an honourable princip'e; and I knew that, under the circumstances, his word would be not only as good as his bond, but *better!* I made no

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hesitation, therefore; but, counting out the money, placed it upon the stump—alongside that curious document, impaled there by the blade of the squatter's knife.

'When 'ud ye like to take pursession?' asked the outgoing tenant.

'At your convenience,' I replied, wishing to behave as courteously as possible.

'It won't take *me* long to move. My furniter ain't very cumbersome; an' I kud let ye in to-morrow, ef't wan't that I hev some unexpected bizness with my friend hyar. Say day arter the morrow? Ef ye'll kum then, ye'll find me ready to deliver up. Will that answer for ye?'

'Admirably!' was my reply.

'All right, then! I'd ask ye in, but thar's nothin' to gie you—'ceptin' that piece o' deer-meat, an' its raw. Besides, strenger, I've some partickler bizness *jest now*, that I'm obleeged to see to.

'Oh, never mind! I shall not need refreshment till I reach Swampville.'

'Wal, then, I'll bid you good-mornin', at the same time wishin' you luck o' your bargain.'

'Thanks—good-morning.'

I leaped into my saddle, and turned my horse's head towards the entrance of the enclosure. I should have given him the touch to go forward with more reluctance, had I not perceived the fair Lilian gliding out of the cabin, and proceeding in the same direction!

Two or three of the bars had been replaced by the clerical visitor; and she had gone, apparently, to remove them. Was it simple courtesy, or a pretence to speak with me? My heart heaved with a tumultuous joy, as I fancied that the latter might be her motive.

When I reached the entrance, the bars were down; and the young girl stood leaning against one of the uprights—her round white arm embracing the post—envied piece of timber!

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"Promise me, we shall meet again?" said I, bending down, and speaking in a half-whisper.

She looked back towards the cabin with a timid glance. We were not observed. The two men had gone into the horse-shed In her fingers I noticed the flower of a bignonia. She had taken it from among the golden tresses of her hair. Her cheek rivalled the crimson of its corolla, as she flung the blossom upon the saddle-bow.

'Promise me!' I repeated in a more earnest tone.

'Yes—yes!' she replied in a soft low voice, that resembled the whisper of an angel; and then, hearing noises from the house, she glided hurriedly away.

'Yes—yes!' cried the mimic thrush, as I rode on through the tall tulip-trees. 'Yes—yes!' repeated a thousand rival songsters; or were the sounds I heard but the echoes of her voice, still pealing through the glad chambers of my heart?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

AN ERRAND OF LOVE.

This second purchase and payment rendered necessary a communication with my Nashville friend. Fortunately, Swampville had a mail; and, to avail myself of it, I rode direct for the settlement.

On my return, figuratively speaking, I found Swampville on fire. Short as had been the period of my absence, it had been marked by an incident of no ordinary character. That morning's mail had conveyed to the settlement the intelligence of a rare and interesting event—the discovery of the gold *placers* of California.

I had heard rumours of this before—only half believed, and not

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yet reaching to Swampville. Returned emigrants from California were now reported as having arrived in St. Louis and other frontier towns, bringing with them not only the full account of the discovery, but its confirmation, in the shape of large 'chunks' of gold-bearing quartz, and bags of the yellow dust itself. The marvellous tale was no longer questioned, or doubted. The mail had brought newspapers from New Orleans and St Louis, giving detailed accounts of the digging of Sutter's mill-race by the disbanded soldiers of the 'Mormon Battalion;' of the *crevasse* caused by the water which had laid open the wonderful auriferous deposits; and describing also the half-frantic excitement which the news had produced in these populous cities.

In this, Swampville had not been slow to imitate them. I found the whole settlement on the *qui vive*: not only the idlers showing an interest in the extraordinary intelligence; but the business men of the place being equally startled out of their sobriety. A 'company' was already projected, in which many well-to-do men had registered their names; and even Colonel Kipp talked of transporting his *penates* across the great plains, and swinging the Jackson sign upon the shores of the Pacific! Swampville was smitten with a golden mania, that seemed to promise its speedy depopulation!

Though many of my old *camarados* of the Mexican campaign found fresh vent for their energies in this new field of enterprise, for me it had no attractions whatever. I therefore resisted the solicitations of the Swampvillians to 'jine thar company'—in which I was offered the compliment of a command. On that day, and at that hour, not for all the gold in California would I have forsaken my new home in the forest—under whose 'boundless contiguity of shade' sparkled in my eyes a 'metal more attractive.'

Instead of longing for the far shores of the Pacific, I longed only to return to the banks of Mud Creek; and chafed at the necessary delay that hindered me from gratifying my wish. Even

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the generous hospitality of Colonel Kipp—amiable under the influence of golden dreams—even the smiles of the simpering Alvina, and the more *brave* coquetry of Car'line—now become a decided admirer of my yellow buttons—were not sufficient to preserve my spirit from *ennui*.

Only at meals did I make my appearance at the hotel—at all other times seeking to soothe the impassioned pulsations of my heart in the dark depths of the forest. There I would wander for hours, not listing where I went; but ever finding myself, as if by some instinct, upon the path that conducted in the direction of the creek!

It was some solace to listen to the notes of the wild wood--the songs of bird and bee—for these had become associated in my mind with the melodious tones of Lilian's voice—to look upon the forest flowers; more especially on the encarmined blossom of the bignonia—now to me a symbol of the sweetest sentiment.

The one most prized of all, I had carefully preserved. In a glass I had placed it, on the dressing-table of my chamber, with its peduncle immersed in water.

My zealous care only procured me a chagrin. On returning from one of my rambles, I found the flower upon the floor, crushed by some spiteful heel! Was it your heel, Caroline Kipp?

In its place was a bunch of hideous gillyflowers and yellow daffodils, of the dimensions of a drum-head cabbage—placed there either to mock my regard, or elicit my admiration!

In either case, I resolved upon a *revanche*. By its wound the bignonia smelt sweeter than ever; and though I could not restore the pretty blossom to its graceful campanulate shape, from that time forward it appeared in my button-hole—to the slight torture, I fancied, of the backwoods coquette.

In the two days during which I was denied sight of her, my love for Lilian Holt was fast ripening into a passion—which absence only seemed to amplify. No doubt the contrast of common

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faces—such as those I observed in Swampville—did something towards heightening my admiration. There was another contrast that had at this time an influence on my heart's inclinings. To an eye fatigued with dwelling long and continuously on the dark complexions of the south—the olivine hue of Aztec and Iberian skins—there was a relief in the radiance of this carmined blonde: that, apart from her absolute loveliness, was piquant from the novelty and rareness of the characteristic. Additional elements of attraction may have been: the *mise en scène* that surrounded her; the unexpected discovery of such a precious jewel in so rude a casket; the romantic incident of our first encounter; and the equally peculiar circumstances attending our second and last interview: all these may have combined in weaving around my spirit a spell, that now embraced, and was likely to influence every act of my future existence.

Therefore, on the morning of the third day, as I mounted my horse, and turned his head in the direction of Holt's clearing, it was not with any design of dispossessing the squatter. Occupied with sweet love-dreams, I had as yet given no thought to the ruder realities of life. I had formed no plan for colonising—neither towards entering upon possession, nor extending the 'improvement' I had twice purchased.

Notwithstanding both purchase and payment, the squatter might still continue to hold his cabin and clearing—only sharing with me the disputed land. Welcome should I make him, on one condition—the condition of becoming his guest; constant or occasional—in either way—so long as I might have the opportunity of enjoying the presence of his daughter, and to her demonstrating my heart's devotion.

Some such idea, vaguely designed, flitted across my mind, as I entered upon my second journey to Mud Creek. My ostensible object was to take formal possession of an estate, and turn out its original owner. But my heart was in no unison with such an end. It recoiled from, or rather had forgotten its purpose. Its

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throbbings were directed to a different object: guiding me on a more joyful and auspicious errand—*the errand of love.*

CHAPTER XXIX.

A RED-SKINNED SIBYL.

Not a sound came from the forest to disturb my sweet musings. Silent was the sky of the Indian summer—soft and balm-laden its breeze. The trees stirred not; the branches seemed extended in the stillness of repose; even the leaves of the *tremuloides*, hanging on their compressed petioles, were scarcely seen to quiver The rustling, heard at intervals, was but the fluttering of bright wings amid the foliage; or the rushing of some mountebank squirrel in reckless evolution among the branches—sounds harmonising with the scene.

Not till I had entered the glade was I aroused from my reverie—at first gently, by the sudden emergence from shade into light; but afterwards in a more sensible manner on sight of a human form, at a glance recognised as that of the Indian maiden.

She was seated, or rather reclined, against the blanched log; her brown arm embracing an outstretched limb; half supported on one leg—the other crossed carelessly over it in an attitude of repose.

Beside her on the log lay a wicker pannier, filled with odds and ends of Indian manufacture. Though I had ridden close up to the girl, she vouchsafed no acknowledgment of my presence. I observed no motion—not even of the eyes; which, directed downwards, seemed fixed in steadfast gaze upon the ground Nothing about her appeared to move—save the coruscation of metallic ornaments that glittered in the sun, as though her body were enveloped in scale-armour. Otherwise, it might have been mistaken for a statue in bronze.

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And one, too, of noble proportions. The attitude was in every way graceful; and displayed to perfection the full bold contour of the maiden's form. Her well-rounded arm entwined the branch—with her large body and limbs outlined in *alto-relievo* against the entablature of the white trunk—presented a picture that a sculptor would have love to copy; and that even the inartistic eye could not look upon without admiration.

Instinctively I checked my horse, and halted in front of this singular apparition. I can scarcely tell why I did so; since neither by look nor gesture was I invited to take such a liberty. On the contrary, I could perceive that my movement was regarded with displeasure. There was no change in the statuesque attitude; even the eyes were not raised from the earth; but a frown was distinctly traceable on the features of the girl.

Thus repulsed, I should have ridden on; and would have done so, but for that sense of awkwardness, which one feels in similar situations. By pausing in the marked manner I had done, and gazing so pointedly at the girl, I had committed an act of ill-breeding—of which I now felt sensible. Indian though she was, she was evidently no common *squaw;* but gifted with certain noble traits, of which many a maiden of white skin might have envied her the possession. Beyond that, I knew she was the victim of a passion—all absorbing as it was hopeless—and this should, in my eyes, have ennobled and sanctified her.

Just then, I had myself no cause to fear an unrequited love—no need to be ungenerous or selfish—and could, therefore, afford to extend my sympathy to the sufferings of another.

It was some vague prompting of this kind, that had caused me to draw up—some idea of offering consolation.

The repelling reception was altogether unexpected, and placed me in a predicament.

How was I to escape from it? By holding my tongue, and riding on?

No; this would be an acknowledgment of having committed

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an act of *gauckerie*—to which man's vanity rarely accedes, or only with extreme reluctance.

I had rushed inconsiderately into the mire, and must plunge deeper to get through. 'We must become worse to make our title good.'

So reflecting, or rather without reflecting at all, I resolved to 'become worse'—with the risk of making a worse of it.

'Perhaps,' thought I, 'she does not recognise me?' She had not looked at me as yet. If she would only raise her eyes, she would remember me as the friend of the White Eagle. That might initiate a conversation; and cause her to interpret more kindly my apparent rudeness. I shall speak to her at all hazards Su-wa-nee!'

The dark Indian eye was raised upon me with an angry flash; but no other reply was vouchsafed.

'Su-wa-nee!' I repeated in the most conciliatory tone. 'Do you not remember me? I am the friend of the White Eagle.'

'And what is that to Su-wa-nee? She has no words for you You may go on!

This decided repulse, instead of bettering my position, rendered it still more complicated. Somewhat confusedly, I rejoined:

'I am on the way to visit the White Eagle. I thought—perhaps—you might—that possibly you might have some message for him'——

'Su-wa-nee has no message for the White Eagle!' cried she, interrupting me, in the same indignant tone, and with a contemptuous toss of her head. If she had, she would not choose a false pale-face like himself to be its bearer. You fancy, white man, you can insult the Indian maiden at your pleasure? You dare not take such liberty with one of your own colour?'

'I assure you I had no such intention: my object was very different. I was prompted to speak to you, by knowing something of your affair of the other night with my friend Wingrove—

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which you remember I was witness of. I could not help overhearing'——

I was interrupted by another quick contemptuous exclamation, that accompanied a glance of mingled vexation and scorn:

'You may know too much, and too little, my brave slayer of red panthers! Su-wa-nee does not thank you for interfering in her affairs. She can promise you sufficient occupation with your *own*. Go! See to them!'

'How? What mean you?' I hurriedly asked, perceiving a certain significance in her looks, as well as words, that produced within me a sudden feeling of inquietude. 'What mean you?' I repeated, too anxious to await her reply; 'has anything happened?'

'Go, see for yourself! You lose time in talking to a *squaw*, as you call us. Haste! or your bell-flower will be plucked and crushed, like that which you wear so proudly upon your breast. The wolf has slept in the lair of the forest deer: the yellow fawn will be his victim! Su-wa-nee joys at it: ha, ha, ha! Hers will not be the only heart wrung by the villainy of the false pale-face. Ha, ha, ha! Go, brave slayer of red panthers! Ah! you may go, but only to grieve: you will be too late—too late—too late!'

Finishing her speech with another peal of half maniac laughter, she snatched her pannier from the log, flung it over her shoulder, and hurried away from the spot!

Her words, though ill understood, were full of fearful significance, and acted upon me like a shock—for a moment paralysing my powers both of speech and action. In my anxiety to ascertain their full meaning, I would have intercepted her retreat; but, before I could recover from my unpleasant surprise, she had glided in among the shrubbery, and disappeared from my sight.

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CHAPTER XXX.

A STORM WITHOUT AND WITHIN.

Heading my horse to the path, I rode out of the glade; but with very different feelings from those I had on entering it. The words of this ill-starred maiden—attainted with that sibylline cunning peculiar to her race—had filled my heart with most dire forebodings.

Her speech could not be mere conjecture, put forth to vex and annoy me? She had scarcely motive enough for this? besides, her display of a positive fore-knowledge was proof against the supposition, that she was deceiving me?

'Slayer of red panthers! You may go, but only to grieve. Your bell-flower will be plucked and crushed like that you wear so proudly upon your breast.'

These, and other like innuendos, could not be conjectural. However obtained, they betokened a knowledge of the past, with an implied forecast of the future—probable as it was painful. The 'yellow fawn,' too. The reference was clear: Lilian Holt was the yellow fawn. But the wolf that had 'slept in its lair?' Who was the wolf? Who was to make her a victim? and how was it to be done?

These unpleasant interrogatives passed rapidly through my mind, and without obtaining reply. I was unable to answer them, even by conjecture. Enough that there *was* a wolf; and that Lilian Holt was in danger of becoming his victim!

This brought me to the consideration of the last words, still ringing in my ears: 'You will be too late—too late!' and, prompted by their implied meaning, I drove the spurs into my

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horse, and galloped forward—as fast as the nature of the ground would permit.

My mind was in dread confusion—a chaos of doubt and fear. The half-knowledge I had obtained was more painful to endure than a misfortune well ascertained: for I suffered the associated agonies of suspense, and darkly outlined suspicion.

A wolf! In what shape and guise? A victim! How, and by what means? What the nature of the predicted danger?

The elements seemed in unison with my spirit, as if they too had taken their cue from the ill-omened bodings of my Indian oracle! A storm-cloud had suddenly obscured the sun—black as the wing of the buzzard-vulture. Red shafts were shooting athwart the sky—threatening to scathe the trees of the forest; thunder rolled continuously along their tops; and huge isolated rain-drops, like gouts of blood, came pattering down upon the leaves—soon to fall thick and continuous!

I heeded not these indications: at that moment, what were the elements to me? What cared I for clouds or rain—lightning, thunder, or the riven forest? There was a cloud on my own heart—an electric rush through my veins—of far more potent spell than the shadows of the sky, or the coruscations of the ethereal fire. 'The wolf has slept in the lair of the forest deer; the yellow fawn will be his victim. You will be too late—too late!'

These were the clouds to be regarded—the fires to be feared: no heavenly light to guide me along the path, but a flame infernal burning at my heart!

The bars were down, but it mattered not: I would have leaped the fence, had there been no gateway: but the entrance to the enclosure was free; and galloping through it, I drew bridle in front of the hut.

The door was open—wide open, as was its wont; and I could see most of the interior, but no one appeared within! no one came forth to greet me!

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Inside, I observed some pieces of rude furniture—several chairs and a rough table. I had noticed them on my first visit; and they were now in the same place, just as I had seen them before. One of my apprehensions was allayed by the sight: the family was still there.

Strange that no one hears me! that no one comes out to receive me!

I made these reflections, after having waited a considerable while.

Surely I was expected! It was the time named by Holt himself—the day and hour!

Was I again unwelcome? and had the squatter relapsed into his uncourteous mood?

It certainly had that appearance: more especially, since it was raining at the moment, as if the very clouds were coming down; and I stood in need of a shelter.

But that grievance was little thought of. I was suffering a chagrin, far more intolerable than the tempest. Where was Lilian?

Such cool reception, on her part, I had not expected. It was indeed a surprise. Had I mistaken the character of this Idyllian damsel? Was she, too, an arch creature—a coquette? Had she bestowed the blossom only to betray me?

I looked down at the crushed corolla borne upon my breast. I had promised myself a triumph by its presence there. I had formed pleasant anticipations of its being recognised—fond hopes of its creating an effect.

The flower looked drenched and draggled. Its carmine colour had turned to a dull dark crimson: it was the colour of blood!

I could bear the suspense no longer. I would have hailed the house; but by this time I had become convinced that there was no one inside. After a short survey, I had remarked a change in the appearance of the cabin. The interstices between the

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logs—where they had formerly been covered with skins—were now open. The draping had been removed; and a closer scrutiny enabled me to perceive, that, so far as human occupants were concerned, the house was empty!

I rode up to the door; and, leaning over from my saddle, looked in.

My conjecture was correct. Only the chairs and table, with one or two similar pieces of 'plenishing,' remained. Everything else had been removed; and some worthless *débris* strewed over the floor, told that the removal was to be considered complete *They were gone!*

It was no use harbouring a hope, that they might still be on the premises—outside or elsewhere near. The pouring rain forbade such a supposition. There was nowhere else—the horse-shed excepted—where they could have sheltered themselves from its torrent; and they were not in the shed. Rosinante was absent from his rude stall—saddle and bridle had alike disappeared! I needed no further assurance. They were gone.

With a heavy heart, I slid out of my saddle; led my steed under the shed; and then entered the deserted dwelling.

My footfall upon the plank-floor sounded heavy and harsh, as I strode over it—making a survey of the 'premises'—my future home.

I might have observed with ludicrous surprise the queer character of the building, and how sadly it needed repair; but I was in no mood to be merry either with the house or its furniture; and, tottering into one of the odd-looking chairs, I gave way to gloomy reflections. Any one seeing me at that moment would have observed me in an attitude more befitting a man about to be turned out of his estate, than one just entering upon possession!

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CHAPTER XXXI

A VIRGIN HEART IN CIPHER.

Gone! and wither gone?

Half aloud, I soliloquised the interrogatory. There was an echo from the empty walls, but no reply. Even conjecture failed to furnish an answer.

The affair was altogether unexpected. Not anticipating that the squatter would leave his cabin before my return, I had made no inquiry either about his destination or future designs; and was, therefore, without the slightest clue as to where he had gone.

Nor should I have had any inquietude at this premature disappearance, but for the words of the Indian sibyl. Beyond the mere disappointment of missing an interview with Lilian—chagrin enough after such high-raised expectation—I should not have felt either uneasiness or regret. It would have been but natural to believe, that they had moved to some neighbour's house—perhaps to that up the creek, where lived the 'friend of Lilian's father'—in all likelihood, the saint I had seen—or some other within a five-mile circuit. Or, if even ten miles distant, what would it matter to me? A ride of ten miles twice a day would be nothing—only an airing for my Arab. I should soon scent out the whereabouts of that sweet-smelling rose. Not all the forests in Tennessee could hide from me my fair blooming flower.

Such *would have been* my reflections, no doubt, had I not encountered the Indian girl. But her words of harsh warning now guided the current of my thoughts into a ruder channel

'You may go, but only to grieve: you will be too late!'

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Figurative as was her speech, and undefined its meaning, it produced within me a presentiment sufficiently real: that the removal was not a mere flit to some temporary shelter under a neighbour's roof, but a departure for a distant point.

Scarcely a presentiment, but a belief—a conviction. Around me were circumstances corroborative of this view. The articles of furniture left behind, though rude, were still of a certain value—especially to a householder of Holt's condition: and had the squatter designed to re-erect his roof-tree in the neighbourhood, he would no doubt have taken them with him. Otherwise they were too heavy for a distant migration.

Perhaps he intended to return for them? If so—but no; there was no probability of his doing so. I need not have tried to comfort myself with the reflection. The innuendos of the Indian had already negatived the hope.

Still vaguely indulging in it, however, I cast a glance around the room—in search of some object that might guide my conjectures to a more definite conclusion.

While so employed, my eyes fell upon a piece of paper carelessly folded. It lay upon the rough table—the only object there, with the exception of some crumbs of corn-bread and the *débris* of a tobacco-pipe.

I recognised the piece of paper. It was an old acquaintance—the leaf from my memorandum book—upon which was written that laconic 'last will and testament,' jointly signed by the squatter and myself.

On observing this paper upon the table, it did not occur to me, that it had been left there with any design. My reflection was, that the squatter had taken it from the stump, and carried it into the house—perhaps to show it to his clerical visitor. No doubt, they had enjoyed a good laugh over it—as the souvenir of a ludicrous incident; and, for this very reason, I resolved upon preserving it.

I had taken the document in my hand, and was about deposit

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ing it in my pocket-book, when my eye was attracted by some fresh writing on the paper. A slight scrutiny of the recent cipher secured for the torn leaf a deeper interest than I had before felt in it: for I saw that it was the chirography of a female hand. What other than the hand of Lilian?

I thought of no other. Beyond doubt, her fingers had guided the pencil—for it was pencil-writing—and guided it so deftly, as to impress me with surprise and admiration. Astonished was I that she—the child of a rude squatter—should be able to set down her ideas in so fair a hand—thoughts thrilling, though simply expressed!

Ah! sweet simple words! Trembled my own hand as I read them—trembled as from a spell of delirium—a delirium produced by the antagonistic emotions of grief and joy!

'Yes! both were present. In that simple inscript I had found cue for both: for there I learned the ecstatic truth, that I was beloved; and along with it the bitter intelligence, that my love was lost to me for ever!

Words of welcome, and words of woe! how could they be thus commingled?

Read them, and learn!

'To Edward Warfield.

'Stranger!—It is to say farewell, but I am, very sad as I write these words. When you asked me to promise to meet you again, I was happy. I said yes. O sir! it can never be! We are going to some far place, and shall be gone before you come here, and I shall never see you again. It is very distant, and I do not know the name of the country, for it is not in Tennessee nor in the United States, but somewhere in the west, a long way beyond the Mississippi river and the great prairies; but it is a country where they dig gold out of the sand—perhaps you have heard of it, and might know it I tried to know its name, but father is angry with me for speaking of you, and will not tell me; and our friend, that you saw, who is taking us with him, will not tell me either. But I shall find out soon, and if I thought you might like to know where we are gone, I would write it to you. I am glad that mother taught me to write, though I de

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not compose very well; but if you will allow me, I will send a letter to Swampville, from the first place we come to, to tell you the name of the country where we are going. I know your name, for it is upon this paper, and I hope you will not think I have done wrong, for I have written my own name beside it. O sir! I am very sad that I am not to see you any more, for I am afraid father will never come back. I could cry all night and all day, and I have cried a deal, but I am afraid of their seeing me, for both father and his friend have scolded me, and said a many things against you. I do not like to hear them say things against you, and for that reason I try not to let them know how very sorry I am that I am never to meet you any more. Brave stranger! you saved my life; but it is not that, I think, that makes me so unhappy now, but something else. You are so different from the others I have seen; and what you said to me was not like anything I ever heard before; your words sounded strange and so sweet, and I could have listened to them for ever. I remember every one of them. And then I was so proud when you took the flower from me, and held it to your lips, for it made me think that you would be my friend. I have been very lonely since my sister Marian went away—she went with the man you saw. I hope to see her soon now, as she is somewhere out in the country where we are going to, but that will not make me happy, if I can never see you again.

'O sir! forgive me for writing all that I have written; but I thought from what you said to me you would not be displeased with me for it, and that is why I have written it. But I must write no more, for my eyes are full of tears, and I cannot see the paper. I hope you will not burn it, but keep it, to remember 'LILIAN HOLT.'

Yes, Lilian! to the last hour, of my life! Close to my bosom shall it lie—that simple souvenir of your maiden love. Sacred page! transcript of sweet truth—hallowed by the first offerings of a virgin heart!

Over, and over, and over again, I read the cipher—to me more touching than the wildest tale of romance.

Alas! it was not all joy. There was more than a moiety of sadness, constantly increasing its measure.

In another moment, the sadness overcame the joy. I tottered towards the chair; and, dropped into it—my spirit completely prostrated by the conflicting emotions.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

A WORD ABOUT MORMON MONSTERS.

Nor long did I remain under the mental paralysis. There was no time for idle repining. The intelligence derived from the torn leaf had given me a cue for action; and my spirit struggled to free itself from the lethargy of grief. Hope whispered the watch-word 'Up and be doing!' and I arose to obey its mandate.

My heart was on fire—wildly, madly on fire. The contents of that epistle, while it imbued my spirit with the sweetest of all earthly pleasures, revealed to it the deadliest of dangers—imparting an anguish only equalled in hell.

It told me far more than the writer herself knew—both of her love and what she had need to fear; for, in her guileless innocence, was she alike unconscious of the passion and the peril.

Not so I. She had placed her heart before me. As on a printed page, I could trace its tender inclinings.

Had this been all, I should have been happy—supremely happy. But alas! that writing told me more: that she who had pencilled it was in deadly peril.

No—not *deadly:* it was not of life; but of something far dearer—to me a thousand times more dear—her virgin honour.

Now comprehended I, in all their diabolic significance, those wild weird words; 'The wolf has slept in the lair of the forest deer—the yellow fawn will be his victim!' Now knew I the wolf—a wolf disguised in the clothing of the lamb!

It needed no acumen to tell to whom the figure referred. The writing itself revealed him—all but the name; and that was manifest by implication. The man with whom Marian went

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away'—he whom I had seen in clerical garb and guise, was the wolf of the metaphor: and that man was Josh Stebbins, the *Mormon.*

With him, too, Lilian had gone away

Not with words can I express the suggestive hideousness of this thought. To understand it in all its cruel significance, the reader should be acquainted with that peculiar sect—known as the 'Church of Latter-day Saints'—should have read its history and its chronicles. Without this knowledge, he will be ill able to comprehend the peculiar bitterness that in that hour wrapped and wrung my soul.

Accident had made me acquainted with the Mormon religion; not with its tenets—for it has none—but with the moral idiosyncrasy of its most eminent 'apostles,' as well as that of its humbler devotees—two very different classes of 'Saints.'

In the animal world, we seek in vain for the type of either class. The analogies of wolf and lamb, hawk and pigeon, cat and mouse, cannot be employed with any degree of appropriateness—not one of them. In all these creatures there are traits either of nobility or beauty. Neither is to be found in the life and character of a Mormon—whether he be a sincere neophyte or a hypocritical apostle.

Perhaps the nearest antagonistic forms of the animal world, by which we might typify the antithetic conditions of Mormon life, both social and religious, are those of fox and goose; though no doubt the subtle reynard would scorn the comparison. Nor indeed is the fox a true type; for even about him there are redeeming qualities—something to relieve the soul from that loathing which it feels in contemplating the character of a 'ruling elder' among the 'Saints.'

It would be difficult to imagine anything further removed from what we may term 'the divinity of human nature,' than one of these. Vulgar and brutal, cunning and cruel, are ordinary epithets; and altogether too weak to characterise such a creature

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Some of the 'twelves' and 'seventies' may lack one or other of these characteristics. In most cases however, you may safely bestow them all; and if it be the chief of the sect—the President himself—you may add such other *ugly* appellatives as your fancy may suggest; and be sure that your portraiture will still fall short of the hideousness of the original.

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of these fanatics is the absolute openness of their cheat. A more commonplace imposture has never been offered for acceptance, even to the most ignorant of mankind. It appeals neither to reason nor romance. The one is insulted by the very shallowness of its chicanery, while its rank *plebbishness* disgusts the other. Even the nomenclature, both of its officers and office-bearers, has a vulgar ring that smacks of ignoble origin. The names 'twelves,' 'seventies,' 'deacons,' 'wifedoms,' 'Smiths' (Hiram and Joseph), Pratt, Snow, Young, Cowdery, and the like—coupled as they are with an affectation and imitation of Scripture phraseology—form a vocabulary burlesquing even the Sacred Book itself, and suggesting by their sounds the true character of the Mormon Church—a very essence of plebeian hypocrisy.

I have used the word 'fanatics,' but that must be understood in a limited sense. It can only be applied to the 'geese'—the ignorant and besotted *canaille*—which the 'apostolic' emissaries have collected from all parts of Europe, but chiefly from England, Scotland, and Wales. The Welsh, as might be expected, furnish a large proportion of these emigrant geese; while, strange as it may sound, there is but one Irish goose in the whole Mormon flock! There are but few of these 'birds' of native American breed. The general intelligence, supplied by a proper school system, prevents much proselytism in that quarter; but it does not hinder the cute Yankee from playing the part of the fox: for in reality this is his *rôle* in the social system of Mormondom The President or 'High Priest and Prophet' himself, the Twelves and Seventies, the elders, deacons, and other dignitaries, are all

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or nearly all, of true Yankee growth; and to call these 'fanatics' would be a misapplication of the term. Term them conspirators, charlatans, hypocrites, and impostors, if you will; but not fanatics. The Mormon fox is no fanatic: he is a *professor* in the most emphatic sense of the word, but not a *believer*. His profession is absolute hypocrisy—he has neither faith, dogma, nor doctrine.

There are writers who have defended these *forbans* of religion; and some who have even spoken well of their system. Captain Stansbury, the explorer, has a good opinion of them. The captain is at best but a superficial observer; and, unfortunately for his judgment, received most courteous treatment at their hands. It is not human nature 'to speak ill of the bridge that has carried one over;' and Captain Stansbury has obeyed the common impulse. In the earlier times of the Mormon Church, there were champions of the Stansbury kind to defend its members against the charge of *polygamy*. In those days, the Saints themselves attempted a sort of defence. The subject was then too rank to come forth as a revelation. But a truth of this awkward kind could not long remain untold; and it became necessary to mask it under the more moderate title of a *spiritual wifedom*. It required an acute metaphysician to comprehend this spiritual relationship; and the moralist was puzzled to understand its sanctity.

During that period, while the Saints dwelt within the pale of the Gentiles' country, this cloak was kept on; but after their 'exodus' to the Salt Lake settlements, the flimsy garment was thrown off, being found too inconvenient to be carried any longer. There the motive for concealment was removed, and the apology of a *spiritual wifedom* ceased to exist. It came out in its carnal and sensual shape. Polygamy was boldly preached and proclaimed, as it had ever been practised, in its most hideous shape; and the defenders of Mormon purity, thus betrayed by their pet protégés, dropped their broken lances to the ground.

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The 'institution' is even more odious under Mormon than Mohammed. There is no redeeming point—not even the 'romance of the harem'—for the *zenana* of a Latter-day Saint is a type of the most vulgar materialism—where even the favourite sultana is not exempted from the hard work-a-day duties of a slave.

Polygamy? No! the word has too limited a signification. To characterize the condition of a Mormon wife, we must resort to the phraseology of the *bagnio*.

In company of a Mormon had Lilian gone away!

No wonder that my heart was on fire—wildly, madly on fire. No wonder my anguish equalled the anguish of hell.

I rose from my seat, and rushed forth for my horse.

The storm still raged apace. Clouds and rolling thunder, lightning and rain—rain such as that that ushered in the Deluge!

The storm! what cared I for its fury? Rain antediluvian would not have stayed me in-doors—not if it had threatened the drowning of the world!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ANOTHER DUEL DETERMINED ON.

Into my saddle—off out of the clearing—away through the dripping forest—on through the sweltering swamp I hurried.

Up the creek was my route—my destination, the dwelling of the hunter, Wingrove. Surely, in such weather, I should find him at home?

It was natural I should seek the young backwoodsman. In such an emergency I might count with certainty on having his advice and assistance.

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True, I anticipated but slight benefit from either; for what could either avail me? The young man was helpless as myself and had similarly suffered. This would secure me his sympathy but what more could he give?

After all, I did not reckon it as nothing. The sympathy of a friend or fellow-sufferer may soothe, though it cannot cure; and for such a solace the heart intuitively seeks. Confidence and sympathy are consolatory virtues—even penance has its purpose.

I longed, therefore, for a friend—one to whom I could confide my secret, and unbosom my sorrow; and I sought that friend in the young backwoodsman. I had a claim upon him; he had made me the confidant of his care—the recipient of his heart confessed. Little dreamed I at the time, I should so soon be calling upon him for a reciprocity of the kindness.

Fortune so far favoured me—I found him at home.

My arrival scarcely roused him from a dejection that, I could perceive, was habitual to him. I knew its cause; and could see that he was struggling against it—lest it should hinder him from the fulfilment of his duties as a host. It did not.

There was something truly noble in this conquest of courtesy over the heart heavily laden—charged and engrossed with selfish care. Not without admiration did I observe the conflict.

I hesitated not to confide my secret to such a man; I felt convinced that under that buckskin coat beat the heart of a gentleman.

I told him the whole story of my love—beginning with the hour in which I had left him.

The tale aroused him from his apathy—more especially the episode, which related to my first meeting with Lilian, and the encounter that followed. As a hunter, this last would have secured his attention; but it was not altogether that. The scene touched a chord in unison with his own memories; for by some such incident had he first won the favour of Marian.

As I approached the *finale* of the duel-scene—that point where

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the stranger had appeared upon the stage—I could perceive the interest of my listener culminating to a pitch of excitement; and, before I had pronounced ten words in description of the clerical visitor, the young hunter sprang to his feet, exclaiming as he did so :

'Josh Stebbins, by the Etarnal !'

'Yes, it was he—I know it myself.'

I continued the narrative ; but I saw that I was no longer listened to with attention. Wingrove was on his feet, and paced the floor with nervous irregular strides. Every now and then I saw him glance toward his rifle, that rested over the fire-place ; while the angry flash of his eye betokened that he was meditating some serious design.

As soon as I had described the winding up of the duel, and what followed—including my departure from Swampville—I was again interrupted by the young hunter—this time not by his speech, but by an action equally significant. Hastily approaching the fire-place, he lifted his rifle from the cleets ; and, dropping the piece upon its butt, commenced loading it !

It was not the movement itself, so much as the time and manner, that arrested my attention; and these declared the object of the act. Neither for squirrel nor coon—deer, bear, nor panther —was that rifle being loaded !

'Where are you going ?' I inquired, seeing that he had taken down his coon-skin cap, and slung on his pouch and powder-horn.

'Only a bit down the crik. You'll excuse me, stranger, for leavin' o' ye ; but I'll be back in the twinklin' o' an eye. Thar's a bite o' dinner for ye, if you can eat cold deer-meat ; an' you'll find somethin' in the old bottle thar. I won't be gone more'n a hour. *I reckon*—I won't.'

The emphasis expressed a certain indecision, which I observed without being able to interpret. I had my conjectures, however.

'Can I not go with you ?' I asked, in hopes of drawing him to

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declare his design. 'The weather has cleared up; and I should prefer riding out, to staying here alone. If it is not some business of a private nature'——

'Thar's nothin' partic'larly private about it, stranger; but it's a bizness I don't want you to be mixed up in. I guess ye've got yur own troubles now, 'ithout takin' share o' myen.'

'If it is not rude, may I ask the business on which you're going?'

'Welcome to know it, stranger. I'm goin' *to kill Josh Stebbins.*'

'Kill Josh Stebbins?'

'Eyther that, or he shell kill me.'

'Oh! nonsense!' I exclaimed, surprised less at the intention—which I had already half divined—than at the cool determined tone in which it was declared.

'I've said it, stranger! I've swore it over and over, and it shell be done. 'Taint no new notion I've tuk. I'd detarmined on makin' him fight long ago, for I'd an old score to settle wi' him, afore that 'un you know o'; but I niver ked get the skunk to stan' up. He allers tuk care to keep out o' my way. Now I've made up my mind he don't dodge me any longer; an', by the Etarnal! if that black-hearted snake is to be foun' in the settlement'——

'He is not to be found in the settlement.'

'Not to be foun' in the settlement!' echoed the hunter, in a tone that betrayed both surprise and vexation—'not to be foun' in the settlement? Surely you ain't in earnest, stranger? You seed him the day afore yesterday!'

'True—but I have reason to think he is gone.'

'God forbid! But you ain't sure o' it? What makes you think he air gone?'

'Too sure of it—it was that knowledge that brought me in such haste to your cabin.'

I detailed the events of the morning, which Wingrove had not

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yet heard; my brief interview with the Indian maiden—her figurative speech that had proved but too truthful. I described the deserted dwelling; and at last read to him the letter of Lilian—read it from beginning to end.

He listened with attention, though chafing at the delay Once or twice only did he interrupt me, with the simple expression—'Poor little Lil!'

'Poor little Lil!' repeated he when I had finished. 'She too gone wi' him!—just as Marian went six months ago! No—no!' he exclaimed, correcting himself, in a voice that proclaimed the agony of his thoughts. 'No! it war different—altogether different: *Marian went willingly.*'

'How know you that?' I said, with a half-concealed hope of consoling him.

'Know it? Oh, stranger! I'm sure o' it: Su-wa-nee sayed so.'

'That signifies nothing. It is not the truer of her having said so. A jealous and spiteful rival. Perhaps the very contrary is the truth. Perhaps Marian was forced to marry this man. Her father may have influenced her; and it is not at all unlikely, since he appears to be himself under some singular influence—as if in dread of his saintly son-in-law. I noticed some circumstances that would lead one to this conclusion.'

'Thank ye, stranger, for them words!' cried the young hunter, rushing forward, and grasping me eagerly by the hand. 'It's the first bit o' comfort I've had since Marian war tuk away! I've heerd myself that Holt war afeerd o' Stebbins; an' maybe that snake in the grass had a coil about him somehow. I confess ye, it often puzzled me, Marian's takin' it so to heart, an' all about a bit o' a kiss—which I wudn't a tuk if the Indyun hadn't poked her lips clost up to myen. Lord o' mercy! I'd gie all I've got in the world, to think it war true as you've sayed.'

'I have very little doubt of it's being true. I have now seen your rival; and I think it altogether improbable she would, of her own free will, have preferred him to you.'

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'Thank ye, stranger! it's kind in you to say so. She's now married an' gone; but if I thort thar had been *force* used, I'd 'a done long ago *what I mean to do now.*'

'What is that?' I asked, struck by the emphatic energy with which the last words were spoken.

'Foller *him*, if't be to the furrest end o' the world! Yes, stranger! I mean it. I'll go arter him, an' track him out. I'll find him in the bottom o' a Californey gold mine, or wherever he may try to hide hisself; an', by the Etarnal! I'll wipe out the score—both the old un and the new un—in the skunk's blood, or I'll never set fut again in the State o' Tennessee. I've made up my mind to it.'

'You are determined to follow him?'

'Firmly detarmined!'

'Enough! Our roads lie together!'

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DEPARTURE IN A 'DUG-OUT.'

We were in perfect accord as to our course of action, as in our thoughts. If our motives were not similar, our enemy was the same. Only was there a difference in our prospective designs. Love was the lure that beckoned me on; Wingrove was led by revenge. To follow *him*, and punish guilt, was the *métier* of my companion; to follow *her*, and rescue innocence, was the *rôle* cast for me. Though guided by two such different passions, both were of the strongest of our nature—either sufficient to stimulate to the most earnest action; and without loss of time, we entered upon it with full determination.

I had already formed the design of pursuit; and perhaps it was with the hope of obtaining an associate and companion, the

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I had sought an interview with the hunter. At all events, this had been my leading idea. His expressed determination, therefore, was but the echo of my wish. It only remained for us to mould our design into a proper and practicable form.

Though not much older than my new comrade, there were some things in which I had the advantage of him. I was his superior in experience. He acknowledged it with all deference; and permitted my counsels to take the lead.

The exercise of partisan warfare—especially that practised on the Mexican and Indian frontiers—is a school scarcely equalled for training the mind to coolness and self-reliance. An experience thus obtained, had given mine such a cast; and taught me, by many a well-remembered lesson, the truthfulness of that wise saw: 'The more haste the worst speed.'

Instead, therefore, of rushing at once *in medias res*, and starting forth, without knowing whither to go, my counsel was that we should act with caution; and adopt some definite plan of pursuit.

It was not the suggestion of my heart, but rather of my head Had I obeyed the promptings of the former, I should have been in the saddle hours ago, and galloping somewhere in the westerly direction—perhaps to find, at the end of a long journey, only disappointment, and the infallibility of the adage.

Taking counsel from my reason, I advised a different course of action; and my comrade—whose head for his age was a cool one—agreed to follow my advice. Indeed, he had far less motive for haste than I. Revenge would keep, and could be slept upon; while with emotions such as mine, a quiet heart was out of the question. She whom I loved was not only in danger of being lost to me for ever, but in danger of becoming the victim of a dastard *coquin*—diabolic as dastard!

Suffering under the sting of such a fearful apprehension, it required me to exert all the self-restraining power of which I was possessed. Had I but known *where to go*, I should have rushed to

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horse, and ridden on upon the instant. Not knowing, I was fortunately possessed of sufficient prudence to restrain me from the idle attempt.

That Holt and his daughter were gone, and in company with the Mormon, we knew: the letter told that. That they had left the cabin, was equally known; but whether they were yet clear off from the neighbourhood, was still uncertain; and to ascertain this was the first thing to be accomplished. If still within the boundaries of the settlement, or upon any of the roads leading from it, there would be a chance of *overtaking* them. But what after that? Ah! beyond that I did not trust myself to speculate. I dared not discuss the future. I refrained from casting even a glance into its horoscope—so dark did it appear.

I had but little hope that they were anywhere within reach. That phrase of fatal prophecy, 'You will be too late—too late!' still rang in my ears. It had a fuller meaning than might appear from a hasty interpretation of it. Had it not also a figurative application? and did it not signify I should be too late *in every sense*? . . . . .

At what time had they taken their departure? By what route? and upon what road?

These were the points to be ascertained; and our only hope of obtaining a clue to them was by proceeding to the place of departure itself—the deserted dwelling.

Thither we hied in all haste—prepared, if need be, for a more distant expedition.

On entering the enclosure, we dismounted, and at once set about examining the 'sign.' My companion passed to and fro, like a pointer in pursuit of a partridge.

I had hoped we might trace them by the tracks; but this hope was abandoned, on perceiving that the rain had obliterated every index of the kind. Even the hoof-prints of my own horse—made but an hour before were washed full of mud, and scarcely traceable.

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Had they gone upon horseback? It was not probable—the house-utensils could hardly have been transported in that way! Nor yet could they have removed them in a wagon. No road for wheels ran within miles of the clearing—that to Swampville, as already stated, being no more than a bridle-path; while the other 'traces,' leading up and down the creek, were equally unavailable for the passage of a wheeled vehicle.

There was but one conclusion to which we could come; and indeed we arrived at it without much delay: they had gone off in a canoe.

It was clear as words or eye-witnesses could have made it Wingrove well knew the craft. It was known as Holt's 'dug-out;' and was occasionally used as a ferry-boat, to transport across the creek such stray travellers as passed that way. It was sufficiently large to carry several at once—large enough for the purpose of a removal.

The mode of their departure was the worst feature in the case; for, although we had been already suspecting it, we had still some hopes. Had they gone off in any other way, there would have been a possibility in tracking them. But a *coupé* in a canoe was a very different affair—man's presence leaves no token upon the water; like a bubble or a drop of rain, his traces vanish from the surface or sink into the depths of the subtle element—an emblem of his own vain existence!

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CHAPTER XXXV.

A DANGEROUS SWEETHEART

Our conjectures as to the mode of their departure were at an end. On this point, we had arrived at a definite knowledge It was clear they had gone off in a canoe; and with the current, of course: since that would carry them in the direction they intended to travel.

The settling of this question produced a climax—a momentary pause in our action.

We stood upon the bank of the stream, bending our eyes upon its course, and for a time giving way to the most gloomy reflections. Like our thoughts were the waters troubled. Swollen by the recent rain-storm, the stream no longer preserved its crystal purity; but in the hue of its waters justified the name it bore. Brown and turbid, they rolled past—no longer a stream, but a rushing torrent—that spumed against the banks, as it surged impetuously onward. Trees torn up by the roots were carried on by the current—their huge trunks and half-riven branches twisting and wriggling in the stream, like drowning giants in their death-struggle. In the 'sough' of the torrent, we heard their sighs—in its roar, the groans of their departing spirits!

The scene was in unison with our thoughts; and equally so with the laughter that at that moment sounded in our ears—for it was laughter wild and maniac. It was heard in the forest behind us; ringing among the trees, and mingling its shrill unearthly echo with the roaring of the torrent. Both of us were startled at the sound. Though the voice was a woman's I could

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see that it had produced on Wingrove a certain impression of fear. On hearing it, he trembled and turned pale.

I needed no explanation. A glance towards the forest revealed the cause. A female form moving among the trees told me whence had come that unexpected and ill-timed cachinnation.

'Lord o' mercy!' exclaimed my companion. 'that Indyum again! She's been arter me since that night, an' threatens to have a fresh try at takin' my life. Look out, stranger! I know she's got pistols."

'Oh! I fancy there's not much danger. She appears to be in the laughing mood.'

'It's jest that ere larf, I don't like; she's allers wurst when she's in that way.'

By this time the Indian had reached the edge of the clearing, very near the rear of the cabin. Without pausing, she sprang up on the fence—as if to enter the enclosure. This, however, proved not to be her intention; for, on climbing to the topmost rail, she stood erect upon it, with one hand clutching the limb of a tree, to keep her in position.

As soon as she attained the upright attitude, another peal of laughter came ringing from her lips, as wild as that with which she had announced her approach; but there was also in its tones a certain modulation that betokened scorn!

Neither of us uttered a syllable; but, observing a profound silence, stood waiting to hear what she had to say.

Another scornful laugh, and her words broke forth:

'White Eagle! and proud slayer of red panthers! your hearts are troubled as the stream on which your eyes are gazing! Su-wa-nee knows your sorrows. She comes to you with words of comfort!'

'Ah! speak them then!' said I, suddenly conceiving a hope

'Hear you that sound in the forest!'

We heard no sound, save that of the water grumbling and surging at our feet. We answered in the negative.

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'You hear it not? Ha, ha, ha! where are your ears? It is ringing in mine. All day I have heard it. Listen! there it is again!'

'She's mockin' us,' muttered my companion; 'thar ain't no sound in particklor.'

'No! we cannot hear it; you are mocking us,' I rejoined, addressing myself to the brown-skinned sibyl.

'Ha! ha! ha! It is *it* that is mocking you. It mocks you, and yet it is not the mock-bird. It is not the dove cooing gently to his mate, nor the screaming of the owl. It is the cuckoo that mocks you! ha! ha! the cuckoo! Now, do you hear it, White Eagle? Do *you* hear it, proud slayer of red panthers? Ha! it mocks you both!'

'Oh! bother, girl!' exclaimed Wingrove in a vexed tone; 'ye're a talkin' nonsense.'

'Truth, White Eagle—truth! The black snake has been in your nest; and yours, too, slayer of panthers! He has wound himself around your pretty birds, and borne them away in his coils—away over the great desert plains—away to the Big Lake! Ha, ha, ha! In the desert, he will defile them; in the waters of the lake he will drown them; ha, ha, ha!'

'Them's yur words o' comfort, air they?' cried Wingrove, exasperated to a pitch of fury. 'Durned if I'll bar sech talk. I won't stan' it any longer. Clar out now! We want no croakin' raven hyar. Clar out! or, by the Etarnal'——

He was not permitted to finish the threat. I saw the girl suddenly drop down from her position on the fence, and glide behind the trunk of a tree. Almost at the same instant a light gleamed along the bark, which might have been mistaken for a flash of lightning, had it not been followed instantaneously by a quick crack—easily recognizable as the report of a pistol!

I waited not to witness the effect; but rushed towards the tree—with the design of intercepting the Indian

The blue smoke lingering in the damp air, hindered me from

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seeing the movements of the girl; but, hurrying onward, I clambered over the fence.

Once on the other side, I was beyond the cloud; and could command a view for a score of yards or so; but, in that circuit, no human form was to be seen?

Beyond it, however, I heard the vengeful, scornful laugh, pealing its unearthly echoes through the columned aisles of the forest!

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE HOROLOGE OF THE DEAD HORSE.

With inquiring eye and anxious heart, I turned towards the spot where I had left my companion.

To my joy he was still upon his feet, and coming towards me. I could see blood dripping from his fingers, and a crimson-stained rent in the sleeve of his buckskin shirt: but the careless air with which he was regarding it at once set my mind at rest. He was smiling; there could not be much danger in the wound?

It proved so in effect. The bullet had passed through the muscular part of the left forearm—only wounding the flesh. It did not even require a surgeon. The hemorrhage once checked, the dressing which my experience enabled me to give it was sufficient; and kept slung a few days, it would be certain to heal.

Unpleasant as was the incident, it seemed to affect my companion far less than the words that preceded it. The allegorical allusions were but too well understood: and though they added but little to the knowledge already in our possession, that little produced a fresh acerbity of spirit.

It affected me equally with my comrade—perhaps more. The figurative revelations of the Indian had put a still darker phase

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upon the affair. The letter of Lilian spoke only of a far country, where gold was dug out of the sand—California of course. There was no allusion to the Salt Lake—not one word about a migration to the metropolis of the Mormons. Su-wa-nee's speech on the other hand, clearly alluded to this as the goal of the squatter's journey!

How her information could have been obtained, or whence derived, was a mystery; and, though loath to regard it as oracular, I could not divest myself of a certain degree of conviction that her words were true. The mind, ever prone to give assent to information conveyed by hints and innuendos, too often magnifies this gipsy knowledge; and dwells not upon the means by which it may have been acquired. For this reason gave I weight to the warnings of the brown-skinned sibyl—though uttered only to taunt, and too late to be of service.

The incident altered our design—only so far as to urge us to its more rapid execution; and, without losing time, we turned our attention once more to the pursuit of the fugitives.

The first point to be ascertained was the *time* of their departure.

'If it wan't for the rain,' said the hunter, 'I ked a told it by thar tracks. They must a made some hyar in the mud, while carrying thar things to the dug-out. The durned rain's washed 'em out—every foot-mark o' 'em.'

'But the horses? what of them? They could not have gone off in the canoe?'

'I war just thinkin' o' them. The one you seed with Stebbins must a been hired, I reck'n; an' from Kipp's stables. Belike enuf, the skunk tuk him back the same night, and then come agin 'thout him; or Kipp might a sent a nigger to fetch him.'

'But Holt's own horse—the old "critter" as you call him?'

'That *diz* need explainin'. He *must* a left him ahind. He wuldn't a tuk *him* in the *dug-out*; besides, he wan't worth takin along. The old thing were clean wore out, an' wuldn't a sold

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for his weight in corn-shucks. Now, what ked they a done wi' him ?'

The speaker cast a glance around as if seeking for an answer.

'Heigh !' he exclaimed, pointing to some object on which he had fixed his glance. 'Yonder we'll find *him!* See the buzzarts ! The old hoss's past prayin for, I'll be boun'.'

It was as the hunter had conjectured. A little outside the enclosure, several vultures were upon the trees, perched upon the lowest branches, and evidently collected there by some object on the ground.

On approaching the spot, the birds flew off with reluctance ; and the old horse was seen lying among the weeds, under the shadow of a gigantic sycamore. He was quite dead, though still wearing his skin ; and a broad red disc in the dust, opposite a gaping wound in the animal's throat, showed that he had been slaughtered where he lay !

'He's killed the critter !' musingly remarked my companion as he pointed to the gash ; 'jest like what he'd do ! He might a left the old thing to some o' his neighbors, for all he war worth ; but it wuldn't a been Hick Holt to a did it. He wan't partickler friendly wi' any o' us, an' least o' all wi' myself—tho' I niver knew the adzact reezun o't, 'ceptin' that I beat him once shootin' at a barbecue. He war mighty proud o' his shootin', an' that riled him, I reck'n ; he's been ugly wi' me iver since.'

I scarcely heeded what the young hunter was saying—my attention being occupied with a process of analytical reasoning. In the dead horse, I had found a key to the time of departure.

The ground for some distance around where the carcass lay was quite dry : the rain having been screened off by a large spreading branch of the sycamore, that extended its leafy protection over the spot. Thus sheltered, the body lay just as it had fallen ; and the crimson rivulet, with its terminating 'pool,' had only been slightly disturbed by the feet of the buzzards—the

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marks of whose claws were traceable in the red mud, as was that of their beaks upon the eyeballs of the animal.

All these were signs, which the experience of a prairie campaign had taught me how to interpret; and which the forest lore of my backwoods comrade also enabled him to read: since at the first question put to him, he comprehended my meaning.

'How long think you since he was killed?' I asked, pointing to the dead horse.

'Ha! ye're right, stranger!' said he, perceiving the object of the interrogatory. 'I war slack not to think o' that. We kin easy fine out, I reck'n.'

The hunter bent down over the carcass, so as to bring his eyes close to the red gash in the neck. In this he placed the tips of his fingers, and kept them there. He uttered not a word, but held his head slantwise and steadfast, as if listening. Only for a few seconds did he remain in this attitude; and then, as if suddenly satisfied with the examination, he rose from his stooping posture, exclaiming as he stood erect:

'Good, by thunder! The old horse hain't been dead 'bove a kupple o' hours. Look thar, stranger! the blood ain't froze? I kin a'most fancy thar's heat in his old karkiss yet!'

'You are sure he has been killed this morning?'

'Quite sure o't; an' at most three, or maybe four hours agone. See thar!' he continued, raising one of the limbs, and letting it drop again; 'limber as a eel's tail. Ef he'd a been dead last night, he'd been stiff afore this.'

'Quite true,' replied I, convinced, as was my companion, that the horse had been slaughtered that morning.

This bit of knowledge was an important contribution towards fixing the time of the departure. It told the *day;* the hour was of less importance to our plans; though to that, by a further process of reasoning, we were enabled to make a very close approximation.

Holt must have killed the horse before going off; and the ac-

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both of us believed could not have been accomplished at a very early hour. As far as the sign enabled us to tell, not more than four hours ago; and perhaps about two before the time of my first arrival in the clearing.

Whether the squatter had left the ground immediately after the performance of this rude sacrifice, it was impossible to tell. There was no sign by which to determine that; but the probability was, that the deed was done just upon the eve of departure; and the slaughter of the old horse was the closing act of Holt's career, in his clearing upon Mud Creek.

Only one doubt remained. Was it he who had killed the animal? I had conceived a suspicion pointing to Su-wa-nee—but without being able to attribute to the Indian any motive for the act.

'No, no!' replied my comrade, in answer to my interrogatory on this head; ''twar Holt hisself, sartin. He couldn't take the old hoss along wi' him, an' he didn't want anybody else to git him. Besides, the gurl hedn't no reezon to a did it. She'd a been more likely to a tuk the old critter to thar camp—seein' he war left behind wi' nobody to own him. Tho' he wan't worth more'n what the skin 'ud fetch, he'd a done them ar Indyuns well enuf, for carryin' thar traps an' things. No, 'twan't her, nor anybody else 'ceptin' Holt hisself—he did it.'

If that be so, comrade, there is still hope for us. They cannot have more than four hours the start. You say the creek has a winding course.

'Crooked as a coon's hind leg.'

'And the Obion?'

'Most part the same. It curls through the bottom like the tail o' a cur-dog; an' nigher the Massissippy it don't move faster than a snail 'ud crawl. I reck'n the run o' the river 'll not help 'em much. They'll have a good spell o' padlin' afore they git down to Massissippy; an' I hope that durned Mormon 'll blister his ugly claws at it.'

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'With all my heart!' I rejoined; and both at the same instant recognising the necessity of taking time by the forelock, we hurried back to our horses, sprang into the saddle, and started along the trace conducting to the mouth of the Obion.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

A LOOK-OUT FROM ALOFT

It cost us a fatiguing ride of nearly twelve hours' duration—most of it along by-roads and bridle-paths—at intervals passing through tracks of swampy soil, where our horses sank to the saddle-girths in mud.

We rode continuously; stopping only once to recruit our horses at one of the 'stands,' or isolated log hostelries—which are found upon the old 'traces' connecting the sparse settlements of the backwoods. It was the only one we saw upon our route; and at it we remained no longer than was absolutely necessary to rest our wearied steeds, and put them in a condition for the completion of the journey.

We knew the necessity of haste. Our only hope lay in being able to reach the mouth of the Obion before the canoe could pass out of it. Otherwise, our journey would be in vain; and we should not only have our long ride for nothing, but would be under the necessity of doubling the distance by riding back again.

Along the route we found time to discuss the circumstances—both those in our favour and against us. The water-way taken by the canoe was far from being direct. Both the creek and the larger stream curved repeatedly in their courses; and in ordinary times were of sluggish current. The freshet, however, pro-

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duced by the late rain-storm, had rendered it swifter than common; and we knew that the canoe would be carried down with considerable rapidity—faster than we were travelling on horse back.

On such roads, and for so great a distance, fast travelling was impossible; and could only have been accomplished at the risk of killing our horses. Mounted as I was, I might have made more of the time; but I was under the necessity of slackening pace for my companion—whose sorry steed constantly required waiting for.

Our sole chance lay in our route being shorter, and in the circumstance that the fugitives had not a very long start of us; but for all this, the issue was exceedingly doubtful; and, by the nicest calculations, we were satisfied that we should have but little margin to spare.

I need hardly point out the importance of our arriving in time Should the canoe get beyond the mouth of the Obion—without our seeing it—we should be left undetermined as to whether they had gone *up* the Mississippi or *down;* and therefore altogether without a guide as to our future movements. In fact, we should be unable to proceed further in the pursuit.

So far as the mouth of the Obion, their route was fixed; and of course ours was also determined. But beyond, it would be on our part mere blind guessing; and, should evil chance conduct us in the wrong direction, the result would be ruin to our hopes.

On the other hand, could we but arrive in time—if only to see the canoe entering the great river—and note which turning it took—our purpose would be accomplished. That is, our *present* purpose; for beyond that of ascertaining their route of travel across the plains, and their point of destination, I had formed no plans. To follow them wherever they might go, even to the distant shores of the Pacific—to seek them wherever they might settle—to settle beside them—beside *her*—these were the ideas

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I had as yet but vaguely conceived. All ulterior designs were contingent on the carrying out these, and still shrouded under the cloudy drapery of the ambiguous future.

The purposes of my travelling companion differed slightly from mine, and were perhaps a little more definite. His leading idea was a settlement of old scores with Stebbins, for wrongs done to him—which he now more particularly detailed to me. They were sufficiently provocative of revenge; and from the manner of my comrade, and the vows he occasionally uttered, I could perceive that he would be as eager in the pursuit as myself. In all probability, an encounter with the migrating party would bring about an important change in their programme; since the young hunter was determined, as he expressed himself, 'to force the durned skunk into a fight.'

Inspired by such motives, we press on to the end of our journey; and reached the mouth of the Obion, after a long and wearisome ride.

It was midnight when we arrived upon the shore of the Mississippi, at its point of confluence with the Tennessean stream. The land upon which we stood was scarcely elevated above the surface of the water; and covered, every foot of it, with a forest of the cotton-wood poplar, and other water-loving trees. These extending along the marshy borders of both streams, hindered us from having a view of their channels. To obtain this, it was necessary to climb one of the trees; and my comrade being disabled, the task devolved upon me.

Dismounting, I chose one that appeared easiest of ascent; and, clambering it up as high as I could go, I fixed myself in a fork, and commenced duty as a vidette.

My position could not have been better chosen. It afforded me a full view not only of the Obion's mouth, but also of the broad channel into which it emptied—at their confluence forming an expanse of water that, but for its rolling current, might have been likened to a vast lake.

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There was moonlight over the whole surface; and the erratic ripples were reflected in sparkling coruscations, scarcely to be distinguished from the gleaming of the 'lightning bugs'—that hovered in myriads along the edges of the marsh.

Both banks of the lesser stream were draped to the water's edge with an unbroken forest of cotton-woods—the tops of which, exhibiting their characteristic softness of outline, were unstirred by the slightest breeze. Between rolled the brown waters of the Obion, in ruder, grander flow, and with channel extended by the freshet. Every inch of it, from side to side, was under my observation—so completely, that I could distinguish the smallest object that might have appeared upon its surface. Not even the tiniest waif could have escaped me—much less a canoe freighted with men; and containing that fairer form, that would be certain to secure the keenest and most eager glances of my eye.

I congratulated myself on reaching this perch. I perceived that a better post of observation could not have been chosen. It was complete for the purpose; and, if I could only have felt sure that we had arrived in time, all would have been satisfactory.

Time alone could determine this; and turning my eyes up stream, I entered upon my earnest vigil.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE WHITE FOG.

Vain vigil it proved. I shall not tire the reader with details. Suffice it to say, that we kept watch till morning's dawn; and then, profiting by the daylight, sought out a more convenient post of observation, where we continued our surveillance—watching and sleeping in turn.

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Throughout the following day, and into the second, was our vigil extended; until, no longer able to hope against hope, we agreed finally to abandon it.

But for one circumstance, we might have had surprise at the result. We were both convinced that we had reached the river's mouth in good time; since, by our calculations, the canoe could not possibly have 'headed' us. But for the same circumstance, we might have believed, that they had not yet come down the Obion; and perhaps would have remained at our post a day longer.

The explanation is this: On the first night of our watch, a few hours after having taken my station in the tree, a fog had suddenly arisen upon the rivers, shrouding the channels of both. It was the 'white fog'—a well-known phenomenon of the Mississippi—that often extends its dangerous drapery over the bosom of the 'Father of Waters:' a thing of dread—even to the skilled pilots who navigate this mighty stream.

On that particular night, the fog lay low upon the water: so that in my position near the top of the tree I was entirely clear of its vapoury disc; and could look down upon its soft filmy cumuli floating gently over the surface—white and luminous under the silvery moonlight. The moon was still shining brightly; and both sky and forest could be seen as clearly as ever. The water-surface alone was hidden from my sight—the very thing I was most anxious to observe.

As if by some envious demon of the flood, this curtain seemed to have been drawn: for, just as the fog had fairly unfurled itself, I fancied I could hear the dipping of a paddle at no great distance off in the channel of the stream. Moreover, gazing intently into the mist—as yet thin and filmy—I fancied I saw a long dark object upon the surface, with the silhouettes of human forms seated upon it—just as of a canoe *en profile* with passengers in it. I even noted the number of the upright forms: three of them, which exactly corresponded to that of the party we were expecting.

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So certain was I, at the moment, of seeing all this, that need not have shouted to assure myself. Excited with over eagerness, I did so, and hailed the canoe in hopes of obtaining an answer.

My summons produced not the desired effect. On the contrary, it seemed to still the slight plashing I had heard; and before the echoes of my voice died upon the air, the dark objects had glided out of sight—passing under thick masses of the floating vapour.

Over and over, I repeated my summons—each time changing the form of speech, and each time with like fruitless effect!

The only answer I received was from the blue heron, that, startled by my shouts, rose screaming out of the fog, and flapped her broad wings, close to my perch upon the tree.

Whether the forms I had seen were real—or only apparitions conjured up by my excited brain—they vouchsafed no reply; and, in truth, in the very next moment, I inclined to the belief that my senses had been deceiving me!

From that time, my comrade and I were uncertain; and this uncertainty will explain the absence of our surprise at not seeing the canoe, and why we waited no longer for its coming.

The most probable conjecture was, that it had passed us in the fog; that the apparition was real; and that they who occupied the canoe were now far away on the Mississippi—no longer trusting to such a frail craft, but passengers on one of the numerous steamboats, that by night as by day, and in opposite directions, we had seen passing the mouth of the Obion.

In all probability, then, the fugitives were now beyond the limits of Tennessee; and we felt sufficiently assured of this; but the more important point remained undetermined—whether they had gone northward or southward—whether by the routes of the Missouri or those of the Arkansas? Upon this question we were as undecided as ever.

At that season of the year, the probabilities were in favour of

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the southern route; but it depended on whether the emigrants intended to proceed at once across the plains, or wait for the return of spring. I knew, moreover, that the Mormons had their own 'trains,' and ways of travelling; and that several new routes or 'trails' had been discovered during the preceding year, by military explorers, emigrants for Oregon and California, and by the Mormons themselves. But this knowledge only complicated the question, leaving us in hopeless doubt and indecision.

Thus unresolved, it would have been absurd to proceed further Our only hope lay in returning to Swampville.

And whence this hope? What was to be expected in Swampville? Who was there in that village of golden dreams to guide me upon the track of my lost love?

No one—no human being. The index of my expectations was not a living thing, but a *letter!*

Assuredly, I had not forgotten that promise, so simply yet sweetly expressed: 'If I thought you would like to know where we are gone, I would write to you;' and again: 'If you will allow me, I will send a letter to Swampville *from the first place we come to*, to tell you where we are going.'

'Oh! that I could have told her how much I 'would like to know,' and how freely she had my permission to write! Alas! that was impossible, but the contingencies troubled me not much; I was full of hope that she would waive them.

Communicating this hope to my companion, we rode back to Swampville: with the design of laying siege to the post-office until it should surrender up to us the promised epistle.

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CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE PROMISED EPISTLE

UNDER any circumstances, a return to Swampville would have been necessary: certain pecuniary requirements called me back to that interesting village.

A journey, even across the desert, cannot be made without money; and the hundred dollars I had paid to Holt, with hotel and other incidental outlays, had left me with a very light purse. It would have taken three times as much as I was master of, to provide us with the scantiest equipment required for a prairie journey; and toward this the young hunter, willing to give his jall, was able to contribute nothing. He would cheerfully have parted with his patrimony—as I with my purchase—for a very slender consideration; but, at that crisis, the Californian speculation demanded all the specie in circulation; and neither his clearing nor mine would have sold for a single dollar, had the payment been required in cash. A credit sale could not serve us in any way; and we were forced to hold on to our depreciated property—upon which not a single cent could be borrowed.

Never stood I in more need of my Nashville friend; and my appeal, already made, was promptly responded to—as I expected it would be. On the third day after my dispatch, the answer arrived—with a handsome enclosure: enough to carry us across the continent, and back again if need be.

We were now ready for the road. We waited only for that letter that was to be the index to our destination.

How we passed our time during that interval of expectation

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is not worth describing. We enjoyed the hospitality of the Jackson hotel, and continued to escape the *espièglerie* of its husband-hunting denizens by hunting the deer of the surrounding forest.

During the whole time, we went not near our respective 'plantations' on Mud Creek. Wingrove had good reason for being shy of that quarter; and I had no inclination to trust myself to its souvenirs. Moreover, the hours of the mail-rider were neither fixed nor regular; and on this account I avoided a prolonged absence from the post-office.

Six days of this expectancy I endured—six days of alternate hope and doubt—the latter at times so distressing, that even in the excitement of the chase I could not procure distraction for my thoughts! More than once, my comrade and I had almost ceased to hope; and half-resolved to launch ourselves on the great prairie ocean—trusting to chance to guide us to the haven of our hopes.

On the sixth day, we had determined upon it; and only awaited the mail, that should arrive on the morning of the seventh.

The seventh proved the day of joy. Our doubts were dispelled. The cloud that hung over our course was cleared away, by the arrival of the expected epistle!

My fingers trembled, as I took the precious billet from the hands of the postmaster. He must have observed my emotion—though I did not open it in his presence. The superscription was enough, to tell me from whom the letter came. I had studied the fac-simile of that pretty cipher, till it was still impressed upon my memory; and could therefore recognise it at a glance.

I did not even break open the envelope till we were upon the road. The postmark, '*Van Buren, Arkansas*,' sufficiently indicated the direction we were to take; and not till we had cleared the skirts of Swampville, and were *en route* for Memphis did I enter on the pleasure of perusal.

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The address was simply as before: 'To EDWARD WARFIELD; and so, too, the apostrophic commencement: 'STRANGER!'

I could have wished for some less distant word—some familiar phrase of endearment; but I was contented—for I knew that Lilian's too recent love had lacked the opportunity of learning its language. Before it had time to achieve the employment of those sweet forms of speech, its course had been rudely interrupted.

Thus ran the letter:

'STRANGER!—I hope you got my other letter, and that you were able to read it, for I had no paper, nor pens, nor ink to write it better—only a little bit of a pencil, that was my mother's, and the leaf which father said you tore out of a book. But I think I could have wrote it better, only I was so afraid that they would see me, and scold me for it, and I wrote it in a great hurry, when they were from home, and then left it on the table after both of them had gone down to the creek to get into the canoe. I thought no one would come to the house before you, and I hoped all the morning you might come before we were gone. I would have given a great deal to have been able to see you again; and I think father would have waited till you came, only his friend would not let him stay longer, but hurried us away. But I hope you got the letter, and that you will not be offended at me for writing this one I send you, without your leave. I promised that if you would allow me, I would write from some place, and tell you the name of the country where we are going; but I forgot that it would be impossible for you to give me leave, as you could not see me, nor yet know where to write it to me. I know now what country it is, for everybody we have seen is talking about it, and saying that it is full of gold, that lies on the ground in pieces as big as hickory-nuts; and I hear the name a many a time, over and over again. Father calls it "Californey," and some "California," and this, I suppose, is the right way of spelling it. It is near a great sea, or ocean as they call it, which is not the same that comes in at Philadelphia and New York, but far greater and bigger than the Mississippi and the Obion, and all the rivers put together. It must be a very large sea to be bigger than the Mississippi! But I am sure you must know all about it, for I have heard them say you had travelled in those far-way countries, and that you were an officer in the army, and had been fighting there with the Mexicans. I am glad you were not killed.

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and got safe home again to Tennessee; for if you had been killed, I should never have seen you; but now it is just as bad, if I am never to see you again. O sir! I would write to you again from that country, when we are settled there; but I fear you will forget me before then, and will not care to hear anything more about us

'I shall never forget our dear Tennessee. I am very sorry at leaving it, and I am sure I can never be happy in California with all its gold—for what good can gold be to me? I should so like to hear sometimes from our old home, but father had no friends who could write to us; the only one we knew is gone away like ourselves.

'Maybe, sir, you would not mind writing to us—only a very short letter, to tell us how you get on with the clearing, and whether you have made it much bigger, and built a great house upon it, which I have heard father say you intended to do. I shall always like to hear that you are in good health, and that you are happy.

'I have to tell you of a very strange thing that happened to us. At the mouth of the Obion River, when we were in the canoe at night-time—for we travelled all that night—we heard some one shouting to us, and O sir! it was so like your voice that I trembled when I heard it, for it appeared as if it came down out of the clouds. It was a thick mist, and we could see no one; but for all that, I would have cried out, but father would not let me speak. It appeared to be right above our heads; and father said it was some woodcutters, who had climbed into a tree. I suppose that must have been it; but it was as like your voice as if it had been you that shouted, and as I knew you could not be there, it made me wonder all the more.

'We arrived at this place yesterday. It is a large town on the Arkansas River; and we came to it in a steamboat. From here we are to travel in a wagon with a great many other people in what they call a "caravan," and they say we shall be many months in getting to the end of the journey. It is a long time to wait before I could write again, for there are no towns beyond Van Buren, and no post to carry the letters. But though I cannot write to you, I will not forget to think of the words you said to me, as I am now thinking of them every minute. In one of my mother's books which I brought with me, I have read a pretty piece. It is in poetry; and it is so like what I have been thinking of you, that I have learned it off by heart. It is so true-like and so pretty a piece that I thought you might like to read it, and hoping it may please you, I write it at the end of my letter, which I fear I have already made too long; but I hope you will have patience to read it all, and then read this poetry.

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"I think of thee when Morning springs
From sleep with plumage bathed in dew;
And like a young bird lifts her wings
Of gladness on the welkin blue.
And when at noon the breath of love
O'er flower and stream is wandering free,
And sent in music from the grove—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

"I think of thee, when soft and wide
The evening spreads her robe of light,
And like a young and timid bride,
Sits blushing in the arms of Night.
And when the moon's sweet crescent springs
In light o'er heaven's deep, waveless sea,
And stars are forth like blessed things—
I think of thee—I think of thee!

'O sir! it is very, very true! I do think of you, and I am sure I shal do so as long as I live. 'LILIAN HOLT.'

'Ah, Lilian! I too think of thee and thy sweet song! Simple, but suggestive words! Knew I but where to address thee, you should soon know, how responsive to them are the echoes of my heart!'

CHAPTER XL.

THE CARAVAN.

WE rode on to Memphis as rapidly as our horses could travel—far too slow for our desires. Thence a steamboat carried us to Little Rock, and another to Van Buren; but many days had been consumed while waiting for each boat—so many that, on arriving at Van Buren, we found that the caravan had the start of us by full two weeks. Its route we ascertained without any difficulty—up along the Arkansas to the Rocky Mountains, through the valley of the Huerfano, and the passes Robideau

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and Cocchetopa—thence across the head waters of the Colorado and by the old Spanish trail to California.

It was essentially a caravan of gold-seekers: adventurers of all nations. Even Indians had gone with it—of the half-civilised tribes of the frontier—red and white equally tempted by the golden attractions spread for them in California. Though large, it was what is termed a 'light train'—having more pack-animals than wagons. On this account, it would make way all the faster; and unless delayed by some accident, we might be a long time in coming up with it; it was not without a large measure of vexation that we learned how far it had got the start of us

I should have submitted with less resignation to the necessary delays, but that my mind had been to some extent tranquillised by the contents of Lilian's letter. They had inclined me to the belief that the emigrants were simply *en route* for California—as was all the world just then—and that the Mormon was, after all, not so strong in his new faith as to resist the universal golden lure. His design in taking the squatter with him might be merely of a secular character—having for its object the securing of a partner, in whose brawny arms the wash-pan and rocker might be handled to advantage.

That they whom we sought were gone with the caravan, we were soon satisfied. Holt was too marked a man to have escaped observation, even in a crowd of rough squatters like himself; but more than one eye had rested upon his fair daughter that longed to look upon her again. Her traces were easily told—as testified by the answers to my sly inquiries. Like some bright meteor whose track across the heavens remains marked by its line of luminous phosphorescence, her radiant beauty was remembered. I needed not to inquire of her. Scarcely a coterie of which she was not the subject of conversation—to my infinite jealousy and chagrin. Not that aught was said of her that should have given rise to such feelings they were but the offspring of love's selfishness.

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Not long had I to submit to such torture. Our stay in Van Buren was of the shortest: in less than twenty hours after our arrival in the village, we made our departure from it—turning our faces towards the almost limitless wilderness of the west.

I had endeavoured to add to our company, but without success. The caravan had cleared Van Buren of its unemployed population; and not an idler remained—at least, not one that felt inclined to adventure with us. Even the needy 'loafer' could not be induced to try the trip—deeming it too dangerous an expedition. To say the least, it was reckless enough; but, impelled by motives far more powerful than the thirst of gold, my comrade and I entered upon our journey, with scarce a thought about its perils.

The only addition to our company was a brace of stout pack-mules, that carried our provisions and other *impedimenta*; while the old horse of the hunter had been replaced by a more promising roadster.

It would be idle to detail the incidents of a journey across the prairies. Ours differed in no way from hundreds of others that have been made, and described—except, perhaps, that after reaching the buffalo ranges, we travelled more by night than by day. We adopted this precaution simply to save our scalps—and along with them our lives—for the buffalo range—especially upon the Arkansas—is peculiarly the 'stamping' ground of the hostile savage. Here may be encountered the Pawnee and Comanche, the Kiowa and Cheyenne, the Waco and fierce Arapaho. Though continually engaged in internecine strife among themselves, all six tribes are equally enemies to the pale-faced intruders on their domain. At this time they were said to be especially hostile—having been irritated by some late encounters with parties of ill-behaved emigrants. It was not without great peril, therefore, that we were passing through their territory; and what we had heard before leaving Van Buren, had made us fully conscious of the risk. To meet with one of

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the hunting or war parties of these Indians, might not be certain death; but certain would they be to disarm and *dismount* us; and that, in the midst of the great prairie ocean, is a danger that often conducts to the same *dénouement*.

It was not preference, then, but precaution, that led us to adopt the 'secret system' of travelling by night.

Our usual plan was to lie by during the day, or sometimes only a part of it, concealed in some selected cover—either among rocks or copsewood. By stealing to a conspicuous eminence, we were enabled to view the route ahead of us, and map out our journey for the night. Upon this we would enter an hour or two before sundown; for then the Indian hunter has returned to his encampment, which could be easily avoided, by seeing its smoke from afar. We often saw their smoke, and more than once the Indians themselves; but were never seen by them—so cautiously had we carried out our measures.

In this fashion we 'groped' our way with considerable rapidity, for, guided by the wagon tracks—especially when there was a moon—we could travel almost as fast as by daylight. Only upon dark nights was our progress retarded; but, notwithstanding every impediment, we were enabled to travel faster than the caravan, and we knew that we were rapidly gaining upon it. We could judge by the constantly freshening trail; but we had a more accurate criterion in *the count of the camps*. By the number of these, we knew to a certainty how fast we were gaining upon the caravan. We were in high hopes of being able to come up with it, before it should enter the mountain passes—more dangerous to the traveller than even the plains themselves, because at that season more beset by bands of marauding savages.

Under the influence of these hopes, we were pressing forward, with all the haste it was in our power to make; when our journey was varied by an incident of a somewhat unexpected character.

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CHAPTER XLI.

AN UNPRAIRIE-LIKE APPARITION.

The incident referred to occurred high up the Arkansas, at the celebrated grove known as the 'Big Timbers.'

We had started about two hours before sundown, and were riding in a due westerly direction, over a 'rolling' prairie—the ridges of which, as ill-luck would have it, ran transversly to our course—causing the path to be constantly going upward or downward.

It was not this that troubled us, but the fact that, as we crested each swell, we were freshly exposed to observation from a distance; and this recurring so often, kept us continuously on the alert.

Once or twice, we thought of halting again till after the sun had gone down: for we knew that we were treading upon dangerous ground; but, failing to perceive any fresh Indian sign, we gave way to our irresolution, and continued on.

We proceeded with caution, however: always ascending in stealthy silence, and peeping carefully over the ridges before crossing them. After reconnoitring the intervening valleys, we would ride rapidly across, to make up the time we had lost in our reconnoissance.

In this way had we travelled some eight or ten miles—until the sun was so low down, that his limb rested on the horizon.

We were ascending a ridge, and had got our eyes on a level with its crest; when upon the face of another ridge—about half a mile further on—we beheld two forms outlined against

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the declivity. We saw that they were human forms, and that they were Indians was our first thought; but a moment's observation convinced us we were in error. They were afoot—Indians would have been on horseback. There was no floating drapery about their bodies—Indians would have had something of this sort; besides there were other circumstances observable in their figures and movements, that negatived the supposition of their being red-skins. They were singularly disproportioned in size, one appearing at least a foot the taller, while the shorter man had twice this advantage in girth!

'What, in old nick's name, kin they be?' inquired my companion—though only in soliloquy, for he saw that I was as much puzzled as himself. 'Kin ye make 'em out wi' yur glass, capt'n?'

I chanced to have a small pocket-telescope; and adopting the suggestion, I drew it forth, and levelled it.

In another instant, I had within its field of vision a tableau that astonished me.

The figures composing it were but two—a very tall man, and a very short one. Both were dressed in round-about jackets and trousers—one, the shorter, with a little dark cap upon his head; while the height of the taller man was increased full ten inches, by what appeared to be a black silk or beaver hat. The cut of their respective costumes was nearly the same; but the colour was entirely different—the tall personage being all over of a bottle-green tint, while his shorter companion shone more conspicuously in sky blue.

Notwithstanding their vivid colours, neither costume had anything Indian about it; nor was it like any other sort of 'rig' that one might expect to encounter upon the prairies. What fashion it was, did not occur to me at the moment; for the sun, glancing upon the object-glass of the telescope, hindered me from having a fair view: moreover, my attention was less directed to the dress of the men, than to their movements.

The backs of both were towards us; and they were going

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forward in the same direction as ourselves. The tall man was in the lead, carrying what appeared to be two guns—one over his left shoulder, and another in his right hand. He was advancing in slow irregular strides, his thin body slightly stooped forward, and his long neck craned out in front of him—as if trying to look over the ridge whose crest he was just approaching.

The short man was some half-dozen paces in the rear; and moving in a fashion altogether different. His body was bent against the hill at an angle of less than forty-five degrees with the horizon; and his short stout legs were playing in rapid steps, as if keeping time to a treadmill! He appeared to be pushing something before him; but what it was, I could not guess: for it was completely covered by the disc of his body spread broadly against the hill.

It was not till he had reached the summit, and made a slight turn along the ridge, that I saw what this object was.

The exclamation of ludicrous surprise that escaped my companion, told me that he had also made it out.

'Good gosh, capt'n!' cried he, 'look yander! Consarn my skin! ef't ain't a *wheellberra!*'

A wheelbarrow it certainly was; for the two men were now traversing along the top of the ridge, and their bodies, from head to foot, were conspicuously outlined against the sky. There was no mistaking the character of the object in the hands of the shorter individual—a barrow beyond the shadow of a doubt—trundle and trams, box, body, and spoke-wheel complete.

The sight of this homely object, in the centre of the savage prairies, was ludicrous as unexpected; and we might have hailed it with roars of laughter, had prudence permitted such an indecorous exhibition. As it was, my companion *chuckled* so loudly, that I was compelled to caution him.

Whether my caution came too late, and that Wingrove's laugh was heard, we could not tell; but at that moment, the tall pedestrian looked back, and we saw that he had discovered

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us. Making a rapid sign to his companion, he bounded off like a startled deer; and, after a plunge or two, disappeared behind the ridge—followed in full run by the man with the wheel barrow.

One would have supposed that the fright would have led to the abandonment of the barrow; but no: it was taken along—hurried out of our sight in an instant—and in the next, both man and machine disappeared as suddenly as if some trap had admitted them into the bowels of the earth!

The singular fashion of their flight—the long strides taken by the gander-like leader, and the scrambling attempt at escape made by the barrow-man—produced a most comic effect. I was no longer able to restrain myself, but joined my companion in loud and repeated peals of laughter.

In this merry mood, and without any apprehension of danger we advanced towards the spot where the odd figures had been seen. Some broken ground delayed us; and as half a mile of it had to be passed over, we were a considerable time in reaching the summit of the hill. On arriving there, and looking over the swell, behind which they had disappeared, neither tall nor short man was to be seen. A timbered valley lay beyond: into this they had evidently escaped. The track of the wheelbarrow, where it had pressed down the grass, alone indicated their recent presence upon the spot, as it did also the direction they had taken.

Their retreating from us was easily accounted for: they could have seen only the tops of our heads, and had no doubt taken us for Indians!

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CHAPTER XLII.

A FOOT OF THIRTEEN INCHES.

The presence of the wheelbarrow explained a point, that had been puzzling us for some days. We had fallen upon its track more than once, and supposed it to have been made by the wheel of a cart; but in no instance being able to find the corresponding one, had given it up as a hopeless enigma. The only explanation we had succeeded in offering ourselves was; that some light cart had accompanied the caravan—the load of which, being badly balanced, had thrown the weight upon one wheel, allowing the other to pass over the ground, without making an impression. As it was only on dry grass we had traced it, this explanation had sufficed—though far from being satisfactory. Neither my companion nor myself ever thought of a wheelbarrow. Who would, in such a place?

'In the name o' Old Nick, who kin they be?' asked Wingrove, as we halted on the ridge, where the fugitives had been last seen.

'I am not without my suspicions,' I replied, just then thinking of a peculiarity that had not received my attention before—the cut and colour of their dresses. 'If I'm not mistaken, the two shy birds that have fled from us are a brace of Uncle Samuel's eagles.'

'Sojers?'

'In all probability, and "old sojers" at that.'

'But what 'ud sojers be a doin' out hyar?'

'Travelling to California, like ourselves.'

'Desarters, may be?'

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'Just what I suspect. No doubt the pair have slipped off from some of the frontier posts; and having no opportunity to provide themselves with a better means of transport, have brought the wheelbarrow with them. It is ludicrous enough, but by no means improbable. There are some queer customers in the pay of Uncle Sam.'

'Darn me ef thar ain't—ha, ha, ha! What shed we do, capt'n? Hedn't we better catch up to 'em?'

'That, comrade, may be easier said than done. If they're deserters—and they must be, if they're soldiers at all—they'll take precious good care not to let any one come near them, if they can help it. The escort that accompanies the train will account for their not being along with it. If they've caught a glimpse of my buttons, they'll be *cached* by this time.'

'They only seed our heads. I reck'n they tuk us for Indyuns?'

'In that case, they'll hide from us all the same—only a little more cunningly'

'Consarn thar sojer skins! Ef they war as cunnin' as a kupple o' 'possums, they can't a hide the track o' the berra; an so long's they keep in the timber, I kalklate I kin lift thar trail. I reck'n, I hain't quite forgot how: though I im bamfoozled a bit by these hyar prairies—consarn them! Ah! them woods, capt'n! it diz one good to look at 'em!'

The eyes of the young hunter sparkled with enthusiasm as he spoke. It was a real forest that was before us—a large tract covered with gigantic cotton-wood trees, and the only thing deserving the name of forest we had seen for many days. As my companion stood gazing upon it, I could trace upon his countenance a joyous expression, that rarely appeared there. The sight of the 'Big Timbers' recalled to him the forests of his own Tennessee—with happy memories of other times. They were not unmingled with shadows of regret: as I could tell by the change that soon came stealing over his features,

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'We must try to overtake them,' said I, without answering to the ebullition. 'It is important for us to come up with them. Even if they be deserters, they are white men; and all whites are friends here. They muster two guns; and if these fellows are what I take them to be, they know how to handle them. We must follow them: there's no time to be lost.'

'Ye're right thar, capt'n! The night's a comin' down fast. It's a'ready gittin' dark; an' I'm afeered it 'ill be tough trackin' under the timber. If we're to catch up wi' them the night, we hain't a minit to spare.'

'Let us forward then!'

Crossing the ridge, we descended rapidly on the other side—the track of the wheel guiding us in a direct line to the nearest point of the woods.

We could tell that the barrow had been trundled down hill at top speed—by the manner in which the iron tire had abraded the surface of the slope.

We had no difficulty in following the trace as far as the edge of the timber, and for some distance into it; but there, to our great surprise, the wheel-track abruptly ended! It was not that we had lost it—by its having past over dry or rocky ground On the contrary, around the spot where it so suddenly disappeared, the surface was comparatively soft; and even an empty barrow would have made an impression sufficiently traceable, either by my companion or myself.

After beating about for some time, and extending our circle to the distance of a hundred yards or so, we failed to recover the sign. Certainly the barrow had not gone further—at all events not upon its trundle.

Instinctively, we turned our eyes upwards—not with any superstitious belief that the fugitives had made a sudden ascent into the air—but the idea had occurred to us, that they might have hidden themselves in a tree, and drawn the barrow up into it

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A single glance was sufficient to satisfy us that this conjecture was erroneous. The thin foliage of the cotton-woods offered no cover. A squirrel could hardly have concealed itself among their branches.

'I've got it!' exclaimed the hunter, once more seeking along the surface. 'Hyar's thar tracks; tho' thar ain't no signs of the berra. I see how they've blinded us. By gosh! thar a kupple o' cunnin old coons, whomsoever they be.'

'How have they managed it?'

'Tuk up the machine on thar shoulders, an' toted it thataway! See! thar's thar own tracks! They've gone out hyar—atween these two trees.'

'Right, comrade!—that is how they've done it, and sure enough that is the direction they have taken.'

'Durn it! ef I wan't bothered wi' these hyar animals, I ked follow them tracks easy enough. We'd soon kum upon the wheel agin, I reck'n—they ain't agoin' to travel fur, wi' a hump like thet on thar shoulders.'

'No; it's not likely.'

'Wal, then, capt'n, s'pose we leave our critters hyar, an' take arter 'em afut? We kin quarter the groun' a good bit ahead; an' I guess we'll eyther kum on them or thar berra track afore long.'

I agreed to this proposal; and, having tied our four quadrupeds to the trees, we started off into the depths of the woods.

Only for a short distance were we able to make out the footsteps of the men: for they had chosen the dry sward to walk upon. In one place, where the path was bare of grass, their tracks were distinctly outlined; and a minute examination of them assured me of the correctness of my conjecture—that we were trailing a brace of runaways from a military post. There was no mistaking the print of the 'regulation-shoe.' Its shape was impressed upon my memory, as plainly as in the earth before my eyes, and it required no quartermaster to recognise the low, ill-rounded heel and flat pegged soles.

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I identified them at a glance; and saw, moreover, that the feet of both fugitives were encased in the same cheap *chaussure*. Only in size did the tracks differ; and in this so widely, that the smaller was little more than two-thirds the length of the larger one! The latter was remarkable for size—not so much in the breadth as length, which was not less than thirteen standard inches! On noting this peculiarity, my companion uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

'Thar's a fut, an' no mistake!' cried he. 'I reck'n twar long legs as made them tracks. Gosh! ef I hedn't seed the man himself, I'd a swore thar war giants in these parts!'

I made no reply, though far more astonished than he. But my astonishment sprang from a different source; and was mixed up in my mind with some ludicrous memories. I *remembered the foot*.

CHAPTER XLIII.

TRACKING THE TRUNDLE.

YES, I had seen that foot before; or one so very like it, that the resemblance was cheating me. This could hardly be. With the exception of its fellow, the foot of my remembrance could have no counterpart on the prairies: it must be the same.

At first my recollections of it were but vague. I remembered the foot associated with some ludicrous incidents; but what they were, or when and where they had occurred, I could not say. Certainly I had seen it somewhere; but where?

No matter: the foot recalled no unpleasant associations. I felt satisfied it was a *friendly one;* and was now more anxious than ever of overtaking its sesquipedalian owner.

After proceeding a short distance, the shoe tracks again be

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cam too indistinct to be followed farther. By quartering, how ever, we came upon them once more—at a place where the im pressions were deep and clearly defined.

Once more the immense foot rose upon the *retina* of my memory —this time more vividly—this time enabling me to *place* it: for I now remembered many an odd incident that had secured it a corner on the page of my recollections. Striking through a stirrup with an enormous Mexican spur upon its heel—its owner mounted on a horse thin and rawboned as himself—I remembered the foot, as well as the limbs and body to which it was attached.

Beyond a doubt, the tall fugitive we were following was a friend—an old veteran of the Rifle-Rangers. The figure, as seen through the telescope, confirmed me in the belief. The long limbs, arms, and neck—the thin, angular body—all were characteristics of the bodily architecture of Jephthah Bigelow.

I no longer doubted that the taller of the two men was my old follower 'Jeph,' or 'Sure-shot,' as his Ranger comrades had christened him; and appropriate was the designation—for a surer shot than Jeph never looked through the hind-sights of a rifle.

Who the little man might turn out to be, I could not guess—though I was not without some recollections of a figure resembling his. I remembered a certain Patrick, who was also a 'mimber of the corpse,' and whose *build* bore a close resemblance to that seen between the trams of the barrow.

My conjecture as to who the men where, increased my desire to overtake them. If the tall man should turn out to be Sure-shot, a rifle would be added to our strength worth a dozen ordinary guns; and, considering the risk we were running—in danger of losing our scalps every hour in the day—it was of no small importance that we should join company with the deserters.

We made every exertion, therefore, to come up with them—

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my comrade employing all the lore of the backwoods, in his effort to recover their traces.

The new footmarks we had discovered, though lost the instant after, had served one good purpose—they indicated the general direction which the two men had followed; and this was an important point to be ascertained.

We found another index in the trees. These in most places stood thickly together; and it was only here and there that an object of such breadth as a wheelbarrow could pass *conveniently* between their trunks. Carried upon the shoulders, it would be an awkward load with which to squeeze through any tight place; and it was reasonable to conclude that only the more open aisles of the forest would be followed. This enabled us to make pretty sure of the route taken; and, after trusting to such guidance for several hundred yards, we had the satisfaction to light once more upon the shoe-tracks.

Again only a short distance were we able to follow them; but they confirmed our belief that we were still on the right trail.

My comrade had suggested that the man who carried the barrow 'wud soon tire o' totin' it:' and this proved to be the case. On striking into an old buffalo path, our eyes were once more gladdened by the sight of the wheel-track—plainly imprinted in the mud.

Our 'prospecting' was for the time at an end. The barrow-track continued along the buffalo-path; and we were able to follow it, almost as fast as our legs could carry us.

Even after it had grown too dark for us to see the track of the wheel, we were not disconcerted. We could follow it by the *feel*—stopping only at intervals to make sure that it was still among our feet.

In this way we had travelled to the full distance of a mile from the place where our horses had been left, when all at once the barrow-track gave out. The buffalo-path continued on; but no barrow had passed over it, unless carried as before. This was

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improbable, however; and we were forced to the conclusion that the two men had turned off, by some side-path we had not observed.

While looking for this, a sound reached our ears, that resembled the murmur of a distant waterfall; but, on close attention, we could distinguish in it a different intonation. Taking the direction whence it came, the sound was heard more distinctly; and, before we had advanced a hundred yards through the thickly standing trees, we were aware that what we heard was the sound of human voices.

Another hundred yards brought us within hearing of words—at the same time that a luminous reflection, cast upwards upon the trees, indicated that there was a fire at no great distance off. As yet, the underwood hindered us from seeing the fire; but guided by its light, we continued to advance; and, after making another long reach through the leafy cover, we got the fire well under our eyes, as well as those who kindled it.

We had no conjecture as to whether we had been following the true track, or whether it was the two runaway travellers we had *treed*. The point was determined by an object seen standing close to the fire, in the full glare of its ruddy light.

Need I say it was the wheelbarrow?

CHAPTER XLIV.

A BRACE OF 'OLD SOJERS.'

YES, it was the wheelbarrow, and the 'U. S. ORDNANCE branded upon its side, and visible under the light of the blazing fire, told whence it had come. Either Fort Gibson or Fort Smith was minus a barrow, drawn from their stores by no very formal *requisition*.

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There were the takers of it—one on each side of the fire—presenting as great a contrast as could well be found in two human beings: although of the same species, as unlike each other as a tall greyhound to a turnspit.

Both were seated, though in different attitudes. The little man was 'squatted.'—that is, with legs crossed under him, after the fashion of tailors. The long legs of his *vis-à-vis* would scarcely admit of being thus disposed of; and his weight was resting altogether upon his hips and heels. In this posture, the caps of his knees stood up to the level of his shoulders—so that his body, viewed *en profile*, presented a pretty accurate imitation of the letter N, that sort termed by engravers the 'rustic letter.' The huge black hat capping one extremity, and the long pedal-like feet that rested horizontally on the ground terminating the other, completed the alphabetical resemblance. A face, with a certain mocking monkeyish expression, but without any trait of fierceness or ill nature—a nose slightly snub—quick scintillating eyes—a chin, tipped with a little tuft of clay-coloured beard—some half-dozen queue-like tangles of bright yellowish hair, hanging down behind the hat—the hat itself a black 'silk,' badly battered—such were the salient points of the portrait appearing above the knee-caps of the taller man.

With the exception of the 'tile,' his costume was altogether military—to me well known. It was the ordinary undress of the mounted rifles: a dark green round-about of coarsest cloth, —with a row of small brass buttons from throat to waist, and overalls of the same material. In the particular sample before us, overalls was rather an inappropriate name:—the garment so designated scarcely covered the calves of the wearer's legs, though of these there was not much to cover. The jacket appeared equally scant; and between its bottom border and the waistband of the trousers, there was an interval of at least six inches. In this interval was seen a shirt of true Isabella colour, which also appeared over the breast—the jacket being worn un-

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buttoned. The frowzy cotton was visible at other places—peeping through various rents both in jacket and trowsers. A black leather stock concealed the collar of the shirt—if there was any—and though the stock itself was several inches in depth, there were other several inches of naked neck rising above its rim. Coarse woollen socks, and the cheap *contract*-shoe completed the costume of Sure-shot—for it was he.

His contrasting comrade was equally in military garb—even more so, by the additional article of a cloth forage-cap. It was also an undress uniform; but, though of very similar cut to the other, and resembling it in the quality of the material, the colour was altogether different. It was sky-blue, turned whitey with wear—the buttons of the jacket being of lead, and the facings of white worsted tape. It was a better fit than the green uniform; and its wearer had evidently some conceit in the style of it—as was evidenced by the jacket being carefully buttoned from waist to throat, and the forage-cap set jauntily on 'three hairs.'

The little man was an 'infantry.' His horizontal diameter was twice that of his tall companion of the rifles, and in the rounded contour of his body, not an angle was apparent. His garments were quite filled by his body, arms, and legs—so that there was not a wrinkle to be seen anywhere. It was a form usually styled 'dapper.' His face was also of the rotund shape—the features all tolerably regular, with the exception of the nose—that, like the nasal organ of his comrade, was a *nez retroussé*—the turn-up being infinitely more pronounced.

The expression was equally indicative of good nature and good fellowship—as the apple-like bloom of his cheeks, and the ochreous tinge upon the tip of the nose, sufficiently testified. Cheeks, lips, and chin were beardless—with the exception of a thick stubble that had lately sprung up; but some well-greased rings of a darkish colour, ruffing out, under the rim of the forage-cap, showed that the 'infantry' was not insensible to the pride of hair. Neither in regard to him had I made a mistaken conjecture

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Another old acquaintance and comrade-in-arms—the redoubtable Patrick O'Tigg—a true son of the 'Sad.'

The two worthies, when first seen, were seated as described—both engaged in a very similar occupation—cooking. It was by the most simple process—that of roasting. Each had in his hand a long sapling, upon the end of which a piece of red meat was impaled; and this, held over the fire, was fast blackening in the blaze. More of the same meat—buffalo beef, it appeared, was seen in the wheelbarrow; its other freight being one or two greasy bags, a brace of knapsacks, a cartouche box and belt, two ordnance spades, with guns—a 'regulation' rifle and musket—lying across the top.

It was evident from this collection that the men were deserters—that they had armed and equipped themselves at the expense of the quarter-master; but perhaps the pay-master was in arrears with them; and they had adopted this ready and effectual method of wiping out the score.

My only wonder was at not seeing a brace of *branded* horses along with them; but in all probability on the day—or night—of their departure, the stable sentry had been doing his duty.

On becoming assured of the identity of the two men, my first impulse was to step forward and make myself known to them. So eagerly were both engaged in attending to their spits, that they had neither seen nor heard us—although they themselves were now silent, and we were within less than twenty feet of their fire. The intervening bushes, however, would have sheltered us from their sight, even if they had been a little more vigilant—as I should have expected Sure-shot to have been. They were trusting all to the thicket in which they had pitched their camp, and being hungry and weary, no doubt, were for the moment off their guard.

Some fantasy decided me not to disturb them for a moment—a sort of curiosity to hear what they would say, and if possible discover their *whence* and their *whither*. We were perfectly

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within ear-shot; and could have heard even a whisper passing from their lips—as we could also note the expression upon their faces

A sign to my companion was sufficient; and, crouching behind the leafy screen, we awaited the continuation of the suspended dialogue.

CHAPTER XLV.

THE BARROW IN DEBATE.

Our patience was not put to a severe test. O'Tigg was not the man to keep his tongue in tranquillity for any extended time; neither was Sure-shot an admirer of the silent system. Both were talkers.

On this occasion, the 'infantry' was the first to make himself heard.

'Be jabers! comrayde, I'm afther thinkin' fwhat purty fools us hiv bin, to tak it afut this way, loike two thramps, whin wez moight ievry bit as wil have been stroidin' a pair ov good pownies. We cowld a fitched a pair from the Fort wid all the aise in the wurlt.'

'Yees, Petric, certing ye aint fer 'stray 'bout thet perticler; we've been almighty ungumptious.'

'Besoides, wez moight as wil hav been hung for a shape as a lamb. We'll be flogg'd all as wan, iv the ischort foinds us, fur takin' the guns an the knabsacks, an' the whaleborra—bad luck to the borra!'

'No, Petrick, don't cuss the berra—it hes served us for certing. We kedn't a got along 'ithout the machine—how ked we? We ked niver hev toted our doins es we've did; an' but for the piece o' bacon an' thet ere bag o' meal, we'd a sterved afore this, I recking. Don't cuss the berra.'

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'Och! it's made my showlders ache, as if some schoundrel had been batin' them wid a sprig ov shillaylah!'

'Ne'er a mind 'bout thet! yer shoulders 'll be all right arter ye've got a wink o' sleep. Spank my skin! ef thet ere wan't a cute dodge—it's throwed the Indyens off o' the scent for certing; or we'd a heerd some'nt o' them verming afore this.'

'Faith, I think we've sucksaided in bamboozling thim, shure enough.'

The meat by this time showed sufficiently done; and the two men applied themselves to eating with an earnestness that allowed no time for talking.

The conversation had revealed enough of their past actions and future designs to confirm the conjectures I had already formed about them.

As stated, they had both belonged to the 'rangers' of immortal memory.

After the disbandment of the corps, they had entered upon a fresh lease of soldier-life, by enlisting into the regular army. O'Tigg had given preference to the sky-blue of the 'line;' while the Yankee had taken to the mounted rifles—as a capital marksman, like he, would naturally do. Indeed, it would have been impossible to have 'licked' the latter into anything like soldierly shape; and all the drill-sergeants in creation could not have made him stand with 'toes turned in,' or 'eyes right.' To have 'dressed' the old ranger in line would have been a physical impossibility.

In the mounted rifles, personal appearance is of less importance; and considering the little inclination there is to enlist in the American army—especially in times of peace—the oddest-looking article is thankfully accepted. In the dearth of recruits Sure-shot would have no difficulty in passing inspection.

Both the infantry and rifleman had evidently become tired of their respective services. The routine of a frontier post is of itself sufficient to produce the deadliest *ennui;* and the Californian

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attraction had 'capped the climax.' The temptation was too strong for either Yankee or Hibernian nature to resist; and these worthy types of both had taken French leave of the fort. It was thus that I epitomised the recent history of my old *camarados*.

As they were evidently aware of the caravan being in the advance, and had been following it, it was easily conjectured that Fort Smith—a military post on the Arkansas opposite Van Buren—had been the scene of their defection.

Very likely they had kept near the train all along the route—with a view to guidance and partial protection—as also for a *dernier ressort* to which they might betake themselves, in case of their stores giving out. The escort hinted at would be sufficient to account for their not being in closer communication with the caravan.

It appeared they had been so far fortunate in escaping an encounter with Indians; but this, as in our case, was chiefly due to the passage of the caravan. We knew that the red-skinned robbers would be too much occupied with the train itself and its more immediate stragglers, to be looking out for any so far in the rear as we; and to this, no doubt, were we indebted for the uninterrupted travel we had achieved. A greater proximity to the train would have rendered our passage more perilous.

Sure-shot, though a slouch in his dress, was no simpleton. The trick of taking up the barrow was a conception of his brain, as well as its being borne upon the shoulders of the Irishman—who, in all likelihood, had performed the *rôle* of wheeling it from Fort Smith to Big Timbers, and was expected to push it before him to the edge of the Pacific Ocean!

It was evident that Patrick was tired of his task: for they had not made much progress in their Homeric supper, before he once more returned to the subject.

'But shure now, comrayde! we moight manage widout the borra—seein' as we've got into the buffalos' counthry. Aren't

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them bastes as aisy to kill as tame cows? Share we'd niver be widout mate as long as our powder lasts?'

'Jess t' other way, ye fool! We're a going out o' the buffuler country, an' into perts where theer aint a anymal bigger than a ret; on t'other side o' the mountings, theer ai'nt no beasts o' any kind—neery one; an' its jees theer we'll want that eer bag o' meel: ef we don't take it along, we'll sterve for certing.'

'Be me sowl! I'd ruther carry the malo on my showlders. There's liss ov it now: an' maybe I could manage it, iv you'd only carry the spids, an' thim other things. We moight lave the knabsicks an' kyarthridge-box behind. What use ud they be in Kalifornia? They'll only lade to our detiction by the throops out there.'

'Don't ee be skeert 'bout thet, kimrayde! Ef theer's troops in Californey, they'll hev theer hands full 'ithout troublin' us, I recking. We ain't likely to be the only two critters as hain't got a pass for the diggins. Ne'er a bit o' it. We'll find deserters out theer es thick as flies on a dungheap. Certingly we shell. Besides, Petrick, we needn't take the knepsacks all the way out theer, nor the berra neyther, nor nuthin' else we've brought from the Fort.'

'Fwhat div yez mane?' interrogated the Irishman—evidently puzzled to interpret the other's speech.

'We kin leave all them fixins in Morming city.'

'But will the thrain be afther thravellin' that way? Sure ye don't know that?'

'Certing it will. A putty consid'able pert o' it air made up o' Mormings; an' they'll be boun' to the Salt Lake. We kin foller them, an' drop t'other. In the Morming settlements, we kin swop our unyforms for suthin' else, an the berra too. Es to the knepsacks an' catridge box, I guess as how I inteend to make a spec on them ere two articles.'

'Fwhat! a pair ov sodger knapsacks an' an owld kyarthridge box! They wuldn't fitch the worth ov dhrinks apaice.'

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'Theer you're mistaking, Mister Tigg. Preheps they'll swop better'n you think. How d'ye know I aint like to git a beest a piece for 'em—eyther a mule or a hoss? This child ain't a goin to fut it all the way to Californey. B'yont the Morming City, he rides a spell, I recking.'

'Be jabers! that's an out-an'-out good oidea. But how dev ye mane to carry it through? that's what bothers Patrick O'Tigg.'

'We—ell, Petrick, I'll tell ee my plan. I hain't got it straightened out yet, but I hope to hev it all right by the time we're on t'other side the mountings—leastwise beefore we reaches Morming City.

'Arrah! fwhat is it?' inquired the impatient Irishman.

The Yankee did not vouchsafe an immediate answer; but, while polishing off the bone he held in his hand, appeared at the same time to be busy with some mental operation—perhaps straightening out the plan he had promised to reveal.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A TOUGH STORY.

For some seconds the two worthies observed a mutual silence, broken only by a formidable rattle of teeth, as large 'chunks' of buffalo meat were put through their respective masticating machines.

Curious to hear the promised revelation, Wingrove and I checked our impatience, and remained in our covert among the bushes.

One thing—to which their speech had incidentally adverted—was not without much significance; and had produced upon me

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a certain impression that was unpleasant. They appeared to know, or Sure-shot did, that at least a portion of the train was *en route* for the Mormon city. It is true that I had already some suspicion of this; but the letter of Lilian had led me to hope it might be otherwise. Any destination but that:

I had commenced reflecting upon this point, when I was interrupted by the voice of Sure-shot resuming the conversation.

Thus did he enter on his explanation;

'Ye see, kimrade, these Mormings, es I've heern, air mighty taken up wi sogerin', an' thet sort o' thing. Ye've heerd talk o' theer great bettelion. They'll be arter these ere treppings for certing, since they hain't much chence o' gittin' soger-fixins out theer. We—eel, what I mean to do is to put the knepsacks off on 'em for some new improvement o' pattern. I guess it air thet —I've heerd say so at the Fort—then the Morming jineral, who air the prophet hisself, an who's got berr'ls o' dollars—he'll buy the knepsacks at any price. Now, d'ye take, Mr. Tigg?'

'Troth do I. But dev ye think yez can fool thim so aisy?'

'Easy as eatin' pumkin pie. Jehosophet! I hain't been five year in the tradin' line 'ithout lernin' the bizness, I recking.'

'Be me faith! yez must hiv been raal cliver at it, whin ye sould thim cypress-knees for bacon-hams to the Bawltemoreans You remimber that story yez towld us down in Mixico?'

'Yees; certingly I reemember it—he, he, he! But I kim a better trick then thet on the Orleens people 'bout five yeer ago —jest 'fore I jined the rangers.'

'Fwhat was it, shure?'

'We—ell, ye see, I wan't allers es poor es I'm now. I hed a pertnership in a bit o' a schooner es used to trade between Bosting an' Orleans, an' we used to load her with all sorts o' notions to sell to the Orleens folk. Jehosophet an' pork-pies! them air fools, an' no mistake—them Creole French. We kod a sold 'em wooden nutmegs, an' brick-dust for Keyenne pepper, an' sech like; an' I 'bout guess es how we did spekoolate a leetle in

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thet line o' bizness. Wall, theer kim a time when they tuk a no tion they ked make cheep *brogans*, as they call 'em, out o' ally gator's leather, an' supply the hull nigger market wi' 'em. The neels were dear, an' so they tuk to usin' boot pegs; but not hevin' a manufactry o' the pegs down south, they hed to git 'em from the no'th. Jest then, my pertner an' I thought o' makin' a spekoolashun on the pegs; so we loaded our schooner wi' thet ere freight, chuck right up to the hetches; an' then sot off from Bosting for Orleens. We thort we'd make our derned fortunes out o' thet eer trip.'

'Shure yez did, didn't ye?'

'No—o—o; ne'er a bit o't. It keemed nigh breakin' us.'

'Arrah, how?'

'We—ell! ye see, when we got roun' to Orleens, we larned thet the boot-trade hed a'most stopped. The allygator leather didn't turn out jest the thing for brogans; an' besides, it got sca'ce by reezun o' the killin' o' them verming. In coorse, the pegs hed fell in price; they kim down so low, thet we ked only git twenty-five cents a bushel for 'em!'

'Mother ov Moses! only twinty-five cints a bushel!'

'Thet was all they'd fetch—offer em' when an' where we would. In coorse we wan't fools enough to take thet—the dernationed pegs hed cost us more in Bosting!'

'Divil a doubt ov it? But fwhat did yez do wid 'em, anyhow?'

'We—ell, Mister Tigg, we weer cleen beet at fust; an' didn't know whet to do—neyther me 'r my pertner. But arter takin a good think over it, I seed a way o' gitting out o' the scrape—leestwise 'ithout sech a loss as sellin' the pegs at twenty-five cents the bushel I seed a chence o' gitting rid o' them at fifty cents.'

'Arrah, now, in fwhat way, comrayde?'

'You've seed boot-pegs, I recking, Mister Tigg?'

'An' shure I hiv. Aren't they the same that's in these sutler's brogues we've got on—bad luck to them?'

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'Jess the same—only whitier when they air new.'

'Be jabers! I think I remimber seein' a barrel full ov thim in New Yark.'

'Very certing it were them—they air usoosly packed in berr'ls. Can you think o' anything they looked like?'

'Wil, in troth, they looked more loike oats than anything I can reccollict. Shure they did look moighty loike oats!'

'An' don't ee kalkerlate they'd a looked more like oats if they'd been pointed at both eends instead o' one?'

'In troth would they—all that same.'

'We—ell, thet's the very idee thet kim inter my mind at the time.'

'Arrah, now, is it? An' fwhat did yez do wid the pegs then?'

'*Jest sharpened the other eends o' 'em, an' sold 'em for oats.*'

The puzzled, half-incredulous stare on the countenance of the Hibernian was ludicrous in the extreme. The allegation of the Yankee had deprived him of speech; and for some moments he sat gazing at the latter, evidently in doubt whether to give credence to the story or reject it as a little bit of a 'sell' upon the part of his comrade—with whose eccentricity of character he was well acquainted.

Equally ludicrous was the look of gravity on the countenance of the other—which he continued to preserve under the continued gaze of his comrade, with all the solemnity of a judge upon the bench.

It was as much as my companion and I could do to restrain our laughter; but we were desirous of witnessing the finale of the affair, and by an effort succeeded in holding in.

'Och now, Misther Shure-shat!' gasped the Irishman at length 'an' it's only jokin' ye are?'

'Truth, I tell ye, Petrick—every word o' it. Ye see the oats weer jest then sellin' at fifty cents the bushel, an' thet paid us. We made a leetle suthin', too, by the spekoolashun.'

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'But how did yez get the other inds pointed, at all—at all?'

'Oh! thet weer easy enough. I invented a macnine for thet, an' run 'em through in less 'n no time. When they kim out at t' other eend o' the machine, *I kedn't meself a told 'em from oats.*'

'Och! now I comprehind. Arrah! and wasn't it a quare trick? Be me sowl, it bates Bannagher all to paces! Ha, ha, haw!'

Wingrove and I could hold in no longer, but joining in the loud cachinnation—as if we had been its echoes—sprang forward to the front.

Infantry and rifleman bounded to their feet with a simultaneous shout of 'Indians!' and dropping their spits and half-eaten *appolas* of meat, dashed into the bushes like a pair of frightened rabbits!

In an instant both were out of sight; and their whereabouts was alone indicated by the rattling of the branches.

I was apprehensive of losing them altogether; and regretted not having used more caution in approaching them. At that crisis an idea came to my aid; and giving out an old signal, well remembered by the *ci-devant* rangers, I had the gratification of receiving a double response.

The utterance of the signal had brought them to an instantaneous halt: and I could hear them exchanging surmises and exclamations of astonishment, as they retraced their steps toward the fire.

Presently, a pair of short, snub-nosed faces were seen peering through the leaves; while from the lips of their owners burst simultaneously 'The cayptin'!' 'The capting!' with various other phrases in their respective *patois* expressive of surprise and recognition.

A few words sufficed to explain all. As we had surmised, the men were deserters. Neither attempted to deny what, in time of peace, is not considered a very heinous crime; and for which,

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just then, the 'Californian fever' was considered an ample justification.

It was no affair of ours. I was only too rejoiced to join issue with the runaways, of whose loyalty to myself I had proofs of old. Their guns—more especially the rifle of Sure-shot—would be a valuable addition to our strength; and, instead of crawling along under the cover of night, we could now advance with more freedom and rapidity.

It was determined, therefore, to share our means of transport with our new comrades—an offer by them eagerly and readily accepted.

The partial consumption of our stores had lightened the packs upon our mules; and the contents of the wheelbarrow, equally divided between them, would give to each only its ordinary load.

The barrow itself was abandoned—left among the Big Timbers—to puzzle at a future period some red-skinned archæologist—Cheyenne or Arapaho!

CHAPTER XLVII.

THE MOUNTAIN PARKS.

We now proceeded along the route with more confidence; though still acknowledging the necessity of caution, and always reconnoitring the ground in advance. Although the four of us might have defended ourselves against four times our number of Indian enemies, we were passing through a part of the country where, if Indians were to be met at all, it would be in large bands or 'war-parties.'

The Arkansas heads in that peculiar section of the Rocky Mountain chain known as the 'Parks'—a region of country cele-

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brated from the earliest times of fur-trading and trapping—the arena of a greater number of adventures—of personal encounters and hair-breadth escapes—than perhaps any other spot of equal extent upon the surface of the globe. Here the great Cordillera spreads out into numerous distinct branches or 'Sierras,' over which tower those noted landmarks of the prairie traveller, 'Pike's' and 'Long's' peaks, and the 'Wa-to-ya' or 'Cumbres Españolas'—projecting far above their fellows, and rising thousands of feet into the region of eternal snow.

Between their bases—embosomed amid the most rugged surrounding of bare rocky cliffs, or dark forest-clad declivities—lie *vallés*, smiling in the soft verdure of perpetual spring—watered by crystal streams—sheltered from storms, and sequestered from all the world. The most noted of these are the Old and New 'Parks,' and the 'Bayou Salade'—because these are the largest; but there are hundreds of smaller ones, not nameless, but known only to those adventurous men—the trappers—who for half a century have dwelt in this paradise of their perilous profession: for here is the habitat of the masonic beaver—its favourite *building ground.*

Over these valley-plains roam 'gangs' of the gigantic buffalo; while in the openings between their copses may be descried the elk, antelope, and black-tailed deer, browsing in countless herds. On the cliffs that overhang them, the noble form of the *Carnero Cimmaron* (*Ovis montana*)—or 'Bighorn' of the hunters—may be seen, in bold outline against the sky; and crawling through the rocky ravines is encountered the grizzly bear—the most fierce and formidable of American *carnivora.* The red cougar and brown wolverine crouch along the edges of the thicket, to contest with jackal and wolf the possession of the carcass, where some stray quadruped has fallen a victim to the hungry troop; and black vultures wheeling aloft, await the issue of the conflict.

Birds of fairer fame add animation to the scene. The mag

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nificent *meleagris*, shining in metallic lustre, with spread wings and tail, offers a tempting aim to the hunter's rifle—as it promises to afford him a rich repast; and the *coc de prairie*, and its gigantic congener the 'sage grouse,' whirr up at intervals along the path.

The waters have their denizens, in the gray Canada and white-fronted geese—ducks of numerous species—the stupid pelican and shy loon—gulls, cormorants, and the noble swan; while the groves of *aiamo* ring with the music of numerous bright-winged songsters, scarcely known the ornithologist.

But no land of peace is this fair region of the Rocky Mountains. There are parks, but no palaces—there are fertile fields, but none to till them—for it is even dangerous to traverse them in the open light of day. The trapper skulks silently along the creek—scarcely trusting himself to whisper to his companion—and watching warily as he renews the bait of *castoreum*. The hunter glides with stealthy tread from copse to copse—dreading the echo of his own rifle. Even the red skinned rover goes not here alone, but only with a large band of his kindred—a 'hunting' or 'war party.'

The ground is neutral, as it is hostile—claimed by many tribes, and owned by none. All enter it to hunt or make war, but none to settle or colonise. From every quarter of the compass come the warrior and hunter; and of almost as many tribes as there are points upon the card. From the north, the Crow and Sioux; from the south the Kiowa, the Comanche, the Jicarilla-Apache, and even at times the tame Taosa. From the east penetrate the Cheyenne, the Pawnee, and Arapaho; while through the western gates of this hunters' paradise, pour the warlike bands of the Utah and Shoshonee. All these tribes are in mutual enmity or amity amongst themselves, of greater or less strength; but between some of them exists a hostility of the deadliest character. Such are the vendettas between Crow and Shoshonee, Pawnee and Comanche, Utah and Arapaho.

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Some of the tribes have the repute of being friendly to the whites. Among these may be mentioned the Utahs and Crows; while the more dreaded names are Cheyenne, Kiowa, and Arapaho: the last in hostility to the whites equalling the noted Blackfeet of the north. In all cases, however, the amity of the prairie Indian is a friendship upon which slight faith can be placed; and the trapper—even in Crow or Utah land—is accustomed 'to sleep with one eye open.'

In past times, the Utahs have been more partial to the pale-faces than most other tribes of Central Indians; and in their territory many of the celebrated trapper-stations or 'rendezvous,' are situated. At times, mutual provocations have led to dire encounters; and then are the Utahs to be dreaded—more, perhaps, than any Indians. In their association with their trapper allies, they have learned how to handle—and with skill—that most formidable of weapons, for partisan warfare—the hunter's rifle.

At the time of which I write, the Utahs were reported to be on good terms with the whites. The Mormons had done everything to conciliate them; and it was said that a single white man might traverse their territory with perfect safety.

It was chiefly in the passes that led to the Utahs' country, that danger from Indians was to be apprehended—in the valleys and ravines above mentioned—where Cheyennes, Comanches, Pawnees, and Arapahoes were more likely to be met with than the Utahs themselves.

We were not yet certain by which pass the caravan might cross the mountains. From beyond the Big Timbers, three routes were open to it. First was the southern route through the Raton mountains, which leads to Santa Fe, in New Mexico, and is known as the 'Santa Fe trail.' I did not anticipate their taking this one. It was not their design, on leaving Fort Smith, to pass by Santa Fe—else would they have kept up the Canadian, by the head of the Llano Estacado; and thence to California by the Gila.

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Another route parts from the Arkansas still higher up—by one of its affluents, the *Fontaine qui bout.* This is the 'Cherokee trail,' which, after running north along the eastern slope of the great Cordillera, crosses it by the Cheyenne Pass, and on through Bridger's Pass into the central valley of the Great Basin.

Neither did I believe that the train would travel by this trail. The season of the year was against the supposition. In all probability, the central route of the three would be the one followed—leading from the Arkansas up the Huerfano river, and through 'Robideau's Pass,' or that of the 'Sangre de Cristo'—either of which conducts into the valley of the Rio del Norte; thence by the famed 'Coochetopa,' or 'gate of the buffaloes,' on the head waters of the Western Colorado.

This pass, though long known to the trappers and *ciboleros* of New Mexico, had only just come into notice as a road to the Pacific; but, being one of the most central and direct, it had already been tried both by Californian and Mormon emigrants, found practicable for wagons. The caravan had left Van-Buren with the design of taking this road; but I knew that the design might be altered by contingencies—hence our uncertainty

The Rocky Mountains could be crossed, by following up the Arkansas to its remotest sources on the southern side of the Bayou Salade; but the stupendous gorges through which that river runs leave no pass practicable for wheeled vehicles. Only by mounted men, or pack mules, can the great Cordillera be crossed at that point; and of course it did not occur to us that the caravan we were following would attempt it. Only at three points need we expect to find its trace parting from the Arkansas—near Bent's Old Fort for the southern route; at the *Fontaine qui bout* for the northern; and for the central, it should diverge up the valley of the Huerfano.

In any case, our risk would be unquestionably great. We should have to travel through districts of country where white

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man and red man meet only as foes—where to kill each other at sight is the instinct and practice of both; and where, though it may sound strange to civilised ears, to *scalp* after killing each other, is equally a *mutual* custom!

Such was the character of the region through which we should have to travel. No wonder we were anxious to come up with the caravan, before it should have passed through the dangerous gorges of the mountains. Independent of other motives, our personal safety prompted us to hasten on.

At first, our new comrades were not exactly agreeable to the design of overtaking the train. They had the *escort* in their thoughts, and along with it the dread of the nine-tailed cat; but a little instruction as to the far greater danger they were in from Indians—of which up to that hour they had been in happy ignorance—reconciled them to our purpose; and thenceforward they picked up their feet with a pleasing rapidity. Both preferred risking the skin of their backs to losing that of their heads. Of the former they had now less fear: as I had promised to *disguise* them, before bringing them face to face with the escort.

Notwithstanding our increased strength, we travelled with as much caution as ever: for the danger had augmented in proportion. We made most way under the friendly shadow of night—sometimes by the light of the moon—and only by day, when we could discover no Indian sign in the neighbourhood.

Two only could ride at a time—the other two taking it afoot; but in this way a journey can be made almost as well as when each has a horse to himself. Our pack animals gave us little trouble: the travel had long since trained them to follow in file, and without requiring to be led.

We refrained from making fires, where the ground was unfavourable. Only when we could choose our camp in the midst of some timbered thicket, or down the secluded depth of a rocky ravine, did we risk kindling fires; and these we extinguished as soon as they had served the purposes of our simple *cuisine*.

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These precautions, drawn from experience, were absolutely necessary in the passage across the prairies—at least by a party so small as ours. Perhaps had we continued them, we might have escaped a misfortune that soon after befell us, and the tale of which is now to be told.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE ABANDONED BOUQUET.

HAVING passed Bent's Fort—of wide celebrity in trapper lore—whilom the scene of many a wild revel of the 'mountain men,' but now abandoned and in ruins—we arrived at the mouth of the Huerfano.

As we expected, the trace turned up the valley of this latter stream—thus deciding the route taken by the caravan.

We rode on through a forest of grand cotton-woods and willows; and at about seven miles distant from the mouth of the Huerfano river, reached a point where the caravan had crossed over to its left bank.

On the other side, we could see the ground of their encampment of the night before. We could tell this by the fresh traces of animals and wagons—débris of the morning's repast—and half-burned fagots of the fires that had cooked it, still sending up their tiny strings of smoke.

The stream at this point was fordable; and crossing over, we stood upon the deserted camp-ground.

With singular emotions, I walked amid the smouldering fires—forming conjectures as to which of them might have been graced by that fair presence. Where had she passed the night, and what had occupied her thoughts? Were those gentle words still lingering in her memory? Were they upon her lips? It

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was pleasant for me to repeat them. I did not need to draw the writing forth. Long since were the lines fixed in my remembrance—oft through my heart had vibrated the burden of that sweet song :

I think of thee—I think of thee!

My reflections were not altogether unmingled with pain. Love cannot live without doubts and fears. Jealousy is its infallible concomitant—ever present as the thorn with the rose.

How could I hope that one hour of my presence had been sufficient, to inspire in that young bosom the passion of a life? It could scarcely be other than a slight impression—a passing admiration of some speech, word, or gesture—too transient to be true? Perhaps I was already forgotten? or only remembered with a smile instead of a sigh?

Though but a short month since our parting, many scenes had since transpired—many events had occurred in the life of that young creature to give her age and experience. Forms of equal—perhaps superior elegance—had been before her eye. Why might not one of these have made its image upon her heart?

The caravan was not a mere conglomeration of coarse rude adventurers. There were men of all classes composing it—not a few of accomplished education—not a few who, using a hackneyed phrase, were 'men of the world'—*au fait* to its ways and its wiles—and who perfectly understood all those intricate attentions and delicate lures by which the virgin heart is approached and captured.

There were military men too—those ever to be dreaded rivals in love—young officers of the escort, laced, booted and spurred—bedecked, moreover, with that mysterious influence which authority ever imparts to its possessors.

Could these be blind to the charms of such a travelling companion? Impossible Or could she—her young bosom just

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expanding to receive the god of love—fail to acknowledge the nearest form as his image? Painfully improbable.

It was therefore with feelings of no very pleasant kind that sought around for some souvenir.

The remains of a fire a little apart from the rest, near the edge of a grove or bit of copsewood, drew my attention. It looked as if it had been a spot on which some family group had encamped. I was led to this conjecture by observing some flowers scattered near the fire—for the grassy sward showed no other sign. The flowers betokened the presence of womankind. Fair faces—or one at least—had beamed in the light of that fire. I felt certain of it.

I approached the spot. The shrubbery around was interlaced with wild roses; while blue lupins and scarlet pelargoniums sparkled over the glade, under the sheltering protection of the trees. By the edge of the shrubbery lay a bouquet, that had evidently been put together with some care.

Dismounting I took it up. My fingers trembled as I examined it: for even in this slight object I read indications of design. The flowers were of the rarest and prettiest—many kinds that grew not near. They had been plucked elsewhere. Some one had given both time and attention to their collection and arrangement. Who?

It would have been idle to shape even a conjecture, but for a circumstance, that appeared to offer a certain clue; and, not without bitter thoughts, did I try to unwind it.

The thread which was warped around the flowerstalks was of yellow silk. The strands were finely twisted; and I easily recognised the bullion from the tassel of a sash. That thread must have come from the sash of a dragoon officer!

Had the bouquet been a gift?—to whom? and by whom?

Here all conjectures should have ended; but not without a feeling of painful suspicion did I examine those trivial signs; and the feeling continued to annoy me, long after I had flung the flowers at my feet.

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A reflection came to my relief, which went far towards restoring my spirits' equanimity. If a gift, and to Lilian Holt, she had scarcely honoured it—else how could the flowers have been there? Had they been forgotten, or left unregarded?

There was consolation in either hypothesis; and, in the trust that one or the other was true, I sprang back into my saddle and with a more hopeful heart, rode away from the spot

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN UNEXPECTED APPEARANCE.

The finding of the flowers, or rather the reflections to which they gave rise, rendered me more anxious than ever to come up with the caravan. The little incident had made me aware of a new danger hitherto unthought of. Up to that hour, my chief anxiety with regard to Lilian Holt had been the companionship of the Mormon. This had been heightened by some information incidentally imparted by the deserters—chiefly by Sure-shot. It related to the destination of a number of the emigrants, who accompanied the caravan; and with whom the rifleman had held intercourse, previous to their departure from Van Buren. These were not prospective gold-diggers, but persons migrating westward from motives more spiritual; they were *Saints* bound for the Salt Lake—there intending to stay and settle. There was a large party of these 'Latter Day' converts under the conduct of an apostolic agent. This much had Sure-shot ascertained. He had not seen their leader, nor heard his name. Josh Stebbins might be the very man?

Even as a conjecture, this was bitter enough. Up to the time of joining with the deserters, I had consoled myself with the belief, that California was the destination of this saint and his squatter protégé; though at times I was troubled with the remem

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brance of Su-wa-nee's words. Their truth was almost confirmed by the report of the ex-rifleman. I could not now think otherwise than that Stebbins was bound for the Mormon City: and that he was the fox in charge of the flock of geese that accompanied the caravan.

It was more than probable. While waiting in Swampville for the letter of Lilian, I had learned something of the history of the *ci-devant* schoolmaster—not much of the period subsequent to his departure from that place—little more than the fact that he had joined the Mormons, and had risen to high office in their church—in short, that he was one of their 'apostles.' This fact however, was one of primary significance.

Had the squatter also submitted to the hideous delusion? Was he also on his way to the shrine of the faith? The answer to the former question was of slight importance, so long as that to the latter might be conceived in the affirmative. If Holt was bound to the Salt Lake, then was the fate of his daughter to be dreaded. Not long there may a virgin dwell. The baptism of the New Jordan soon initiates its female neophytes into the mysteries of womanhood—absolutely compelling them to the marriage tie—forcing them to a wedlock loveless and unholy.

Suffering under such apprehensions, I scarcely needed the additional stimulus of jealousy to urge me onward; and yet, strange as it may appear, the finding of the bouquet had produced this effect.

I would have ridden on without halt, but our animals required rest. We had been travelling nearly all night, and throughout the morning—under the friendly shelter of the cotton wood forest.

We needed an hour or two of repose; and, seeking a secure place near the ground of the deserted camp, we stopped to obtain it.

The train could not be far ahead of us? While seated in silence around the fire we had kindled, we could hear at intervals the reports of guns. They came from up the valley, and from a

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good distance. The sounds reached us but faintly—now single shots, and then two or three together, or following in quick succession.

We were at no loss to account for the reports. They were caused by the hunters of the caravan, in pursuit of game. We had now entered that charming region where elk and antelope abounded. On our morning march, we had seen herds of both trooping over the sward—almost within range of our rifles. Even as we sat, a band of beautiful antelopes appeared in the open ground near our bivouac fire; and after satisfying their curiosity by gazing at us for a moment, they trotted off into the covert.

It was a tempting sight—too tempting for the young backwoods hunter to resist. Seizing his rifle, he took after them—promising us as he went off a more savory breakfast than the dry buffalo-meat we were broiling.

Soon after we heard the crack of his rifle: and presently, he re-appeared with a dead 'prong-horn' upon his shoulders.

As Wingrove came up to the fire, I noticed a singular expression upon his countenance. Instead of being rejoiced at his success, his looks betrayed anxiety.

I questioned him as to the cause. Instead of answering directly, he drew me to one side, and inquired in a whisper if I had seen any one in his absence.

'No. Why do you ask?'

'If it wan't altogether unpossible, I'd swar I seed that girl.'

'What girl?'

I trembled as I put the question: I was thinking of Lillian.

'That darnation devil of a Chickasaw.'

'What! Su-wa-nee?'

'Yes—Su-wa-nee.'

'Oh—that cannot be! It could not be her?'

'So I'd a thort myself; but darn me, capt'n! if I kin b'lieve it wan't her. What I seen was as like her as two squ'lls.'

'What did you see?'

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'Why, jest arter I'd killed the goat, an' war heisting it on my shoulders, I spied a Indyen glidin' into the bushes. I seed it war a squaw; an' jest the picter o' the Chicasaw. She 'peared as ef she hed kim right from hyar, an' I thort you mout a seed her'

'Did you get sight of her face?'

'No, her back war torst me, an' she kep on 'ithout turnin' or stoppin' a minnit. 'Twar the very duds that girl used to wear, an' her bulk to an inch. It kudn't a been liker her. Darn me, ef it wan't eyther her or her ghost.

'It is very improbable that it could have been either.'

I did not for a moment entertain the idea that it was the Chicasaw he had seen; and yet my comrade was fully impressed with the belief, and reiterated the assertion that he had either seen Su-wa-nee or her 'shadder.'

Though the thing was improbable, it was not beyond possibility. We knew that there were Indians travelling with the train: we had heard so before starting out. But what likelihood was there of Su-wa-nee being among them? Certainly not much.

That there were prairie Indians around us was probable enough; in fact, more than probable: it was certain. We had already observed their traces upon the ground of the deserted camp. The 'squaw' seen by Wingrove might be one of these.

Whether or not, her presence proved the proximity of redskins; and the knowledge of having such dangerous neighbours summoned us to a fresh exercise of vigilance and caution. Our fire was instantly extinguished; and contenting ourselves with a morsel of the half-broiled buffalo-beef, we moved to some distance from the spot, before proceeding to cook the antelope.

A dark covert in the thick woods offered us a more secure kitchen. There we rekindled our fire—and roasting the ribs of the prong-horn, refreshed ourselves with an ample meal.

After an hour's repose, we resumed our journey—in confident expectation that before sunset we should get within sight of the caravan.

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CHAPTER L.

UP THE CAÑON.

We had not ridden far from our halting-place when we arrived at the end of the great cottonwood forest. Beyond that, the trace led over open ground—here and there dotted by groves and 'islands' of timber.

Through these we threaded our way—keeping as much as possible among the trees.

Further on, we came upon a gorge—one of the noted *cañons* through which the Huerfano runs. Here the river sweeps down a narrow channel, with rocky banks that rise on each side into precipitous cliffs of stupendous height.

To avoid this gorge—impassable for wheeled vehicles—the wagon-trace, below its entrance, turns off to the right; and we perceived that the caravan had taken that direction. To get round the heads of the transverse ravines, that run into the *cañon*, a detour must be made of not less than ten miles in length. Beyond the cañon—the trace once more returns to the stream.

The notes of a military reconnoissance had forewarned me of this deviation: and further, that the trace passed over a ridge altogether destitute of timber. To follow it, therefore, in the broad light of day, would expose our little party to view. If hostile Indians should be hanging after the caravan, they would be sure to see us, and equally certain to make an attack upon us; and from the traces we had noticed at the night-camp—to say nothing of what Wingrove had seen—we knew there were Indians in the valley. They might not be hostile; but the chances were ten to one that they were; and, under this supposition, if

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would be imprudent in us to risk crossing the bridge before night-fall.

There were two alternatives—to remain under the timber till after sunset, and then proceed by night; or to push on into the cañon, and endeavour to make our way along the bed of the stream. So far as we knew, the path was an untried one; but it might be practicable for horses.

We were now on the most dangerous ground we had yet trodden—the highway of several hostile tribes, and their favourite *tenting*-ground, when going to or returning from their forays against the half-civilized settlements of New Mexico. The proximity of the caravan—which we calculated to be about ten miles ahead of us—only increased our risk. There was but little danger of the Indians attacking that; the train was too strong, even without the escort. But the probability was, that a band of Indian horse-thieves would be skulking on its skirts—not to make an attack on the caravan itself—but as wolves after a gang of buffalo, to sacrifice the stragglers. Unless when irritated by some hostile demonstration, these robbers confine themselves to plundering, but in the case of some, murder is the usual concomitant of plunder.

The delay of another night was disheartening to all of us—but especially so to myself, for reasons already known. If we should succeed in passing through the cañon, perhaps on the other side we might come in sight of the caravan? Cheered on by this hope, we hesitated no longer; but, hastening forward, entered between the jaws of the defile.

A fearful chasm it was—the rocky walls rising perpendicularly to the height of many hundreds of feet—presenting a grim *façade* on each side of us. The sky above appeared a mere strip of blue: and we were surrounded by a gloom deeper than that of twilight. The torrent roared and foamed at our feet; and the trail at times traversed through the water.

There *was* a trail, as we soon perceived; and, what was more

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significant, one that had recently been travelled. Horses had been over it; and in several places the rocky pebbles, that should otherwise have been dry, were wet by the water that had dripped from their fetlocks. A large troop of horses must have passed just before us!

Had the dragoon escort gone that way? More likely a party of mounted travellers belonging to the train? And yet this did not strike us as being likely.

We were soon convinced that such was not the case. On riding forward, we came upon a mud deposit, at the mouth of one of the transverse ravines, over which led the trail. The mud exhibited the *tracks* distinctly and in a more significant light—they were *hoof-tracks!* We saw that more than a hundred horses had passed up the defile; and not one *shod* animal among them.

This fact was very significant. They could not have been troop-horses? nor yet those of white men? If ridden, they must have been ridden by Indians?

It did not follow that they were ridden. We were travelling through the region of the *mustang*. Droves had been seen upon our route, at great distances off—for these are the shiest and wildest of wild animals. A *caballada* may have passed through the gorge, on their way to the upper valley. There was nothing improbable in that. Although the plains are the favourite habitat of the horse, the *mustang* of Spanish America is half a mountain animal, and often penetrates the most difficult passes—climbing the declivities with hoof as sure as that of the chamois.

Had these horses been ridden? That was the point to be determined, and how?

The sign was not very intelligible, but sufficiently so for our purpose. The little belt of mud deposit was only disturbed by a single line of tracks—crossing it directly from side to side. The animals had traversed it in single file. Wild horses would have *crowded over it*—some of them at least kicking out to one side or the other. This I myself knew.

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The reasoning appeared conclusive. We had no longer a doubt that a large party of Indians had gone up the gorge before us, and not very long before us.

It now became a question of advance or retreat. To halt within the defile—even had a halting-place offered—would have been perilous above all things There was no spot where w could conceal either ourselves or our animals. The mounted Indians might be returning down again; and, finding us in such a snug trap, would have us at their mercy. We did not think, therefore, of staying where we were.

To go back was too discouraging. We were already half through the cañon, and had ridden over a most difficult path—often fording the stream at great risk, and climbing over boulders of rock, that imperilled the necks both of ourselves and our animals.

We determined to keep on.

We were in hopes that the Indians had by this time passed clear through the gorge, and ridden out into the valley above. In that case, there would be no great risk in our proceeding to the upper end.

Our expectations did not deceive us. We reached the mouth of the chasm without having seen other signs of those who had preceeded us, than the trail of their horses.

We had heard sounds, however, that had given us some apprehension—the reports of guns—not as during the early part of the day, in single shots, but in half-dozens at a time, and once or twice in larger volleys, as if of a scattering *fusillade!*

The sounds came from the direction of the upper valley; and were but faintly heard—so faintly that we were in doubt as to whether they were the reports of fire-arms. The grumbling and rushing of the river hindered us from hearing them more distinctly.

But for the presence of Indians in the valley—about which we were quite certain—we should perhaps not have noticed the

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sounds, or else have taken them for something else. Perhaps we might have conjectured that a gang of buffaloes had passed near the train—leading to a brisk firing of rifles; but the presence of the Indians rendered this hypothesis less probable.

We still continued to observe caution. Before emerging from the defile, we halted near its entrance—Wingrove and myself stealing forward to reconnoitre.

An elevated post, which we obtained upon a shelf of the rock, gave us a commanding prospect of the upper valley. The sight restored our confidence; *the caravan was in view!*

CHAPTER LI.

THE ORPHAN BUTTE.

The landscape over which we were looking was one that has long been celebrated in the legends of trapper and *cibolero;* and certainly no lovelier is to be met with in the midland regions of America. Though new to my eyes, I recognised it from the descriptions I had read and heard of it. There was an idiosyncrasy in its features—especially in that lone mound rising conspicuously in its midst—which at once proclaimed it the valley of the Huerfano. There stood the 'Orphan Butte.' There was no mistaking its identity.

This valley, or, more properly, *vallé*—a word of very different signification—is in reality a level plain, flanked on each side by a continuous line of bluffs or 'benches'—themselves forming the abutments of a still higher plain, which constitutes the general level of the country. The width between the bluffs is five or six miles; but at the distance of some ten miles from our point of view, the cliffs converge—apparently closing in the valley in that direction. This, however, is only apparent. Above the

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butte is another deep cañon, through which the river has cleft its way.

The intervening space is a picture fair to behold. The surface, level as a billiard-table, is covered with *gramma* grass, of a bright, almost emerald verdure. The uniformity of this colour is relieved by cottonwood copses, whose foliage is but one shade darker. Commingling with these, and again slightly darkening the hue of their frondage, are other trees, with a variety of shrubs or climbing plants—as clematis, wild roses, and willows. Here and there, a noble poplar stands apart—as if disdaining to associate with the more lowly growth of the groves.

These 'topes' are of varied forms: some rounded, some oval, and others of more irregular shape—many of them appearing as if planted by the hands of the landscape gardener; while the Huerfano, winding through their midst, could not have been more gracefully guided had it been specially designed for an ornamental water.

The butte itself, rising in the centre of the plain, and towering nearly two hundred feet above the general level, has all the semblance of an artificial work—not of human hands, but a cairn constructed by giants. Just such does it appear—a vast pyramidal cone, composed of huge prismatic blocks of granite, black almost as coal—the colour occasioned by an iron admixture in the rock.

For two-thirds of its slope, a thick growth of cedar covers it with a skirting of darkest green. Above this appear the huge naked prisms—piled one upon the other, in a sort of irregular crystallisation, and ending in a summit slightly truncated.

Detached boulders lie around its base, that, having yielded to the disintegrating influences of rain and wind, and lost their balance, have rolled down the declivity of its sides.

No other similar elevation is near—the distant bluffs alone equalling it in height. But there the resemblance ends: for the latter are a formation of stratified sandstone, while the rocks composing the butte are purely granitic! Even in a geological

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point of view, is the Orphan Butte isolated from all the world. In a double sense does it merit its distinctive title.

Singular is the picture formed by this lone mound, and the park-like scene that surrounds it—a picture rare as fair Its very frame is peculiar. The bench of light reddish sandstone sharply outlined on each edge—the bright green of the sward along its base—and the dark belt of cedars cresting its summit, form as it were, a double moulding to the frame. Over this can be distinguished the darker outlines of the great Cordilleras; above them, again, the snowy cones of the Wa-to-yah; and grandly towering over all, the sky-piercing summit of Pike's Peak.

All these forms gleaming in the full light of a noonday sun, with a heaven above them of deep ethereal blue, present a picture that for grandeur and sublimity is not surpassed upon the Earth.

A long while could we have gazed upon it; but an object that came at once under our eyes turned our thoughts into a far different channel.

Away up the valley, at its furthest end, appeared a small white spot—a little bigger to our view than the disc of an archer's target. It was of an irregular roundish form; and on both sides of it were other shapes—smaller and of darker hue.

We had no difficulty in making out what these appearances were: the white object was the tilt of a wagon; the dark forms around it were those of men—mounted and afoot.

It must have been the last wagon of the train, since no other could be seen; and as it appeared at the very end of the valley—in the angle formed by the convergence of the cliffs—we concluded that another cañon opened there into which the rest had entered. Whether the wagon was moving onward, we did not stay to determine; the caravan was in sight, and this, acting upon us like an electric influence, impelled us to hasten forward.

Calling to our companions to advance, and having remounted, we rode out of the gorge, and kept on up the valley.

We no longer observed the slightest caution. The caravan

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was before our eyes; and there could be no doubt that in a couple of hours we should be able to come up with it.

As to danger, we no longer thought of such a thing. Indians would scarcely be so daring as to assail us within sight of the train. Had it been night, we might have reasoned differently; but under the broad light of day, we could not imagine there was a prospect of danger. We determined, therefore, to ride direct for the wagons, without making halt.

Yes—one halt was to be made. I had promised the *ci-devant* soldiers to make *civilians* of them before bringing them face to face with the escort; and this was to be accomplished by means of some spare wardrobe which Wingrove and I chanced to have among our packs. The place fixed upon as the scene of the metamorphosis was the butte, which lay directly on our route.

As we rode forward I was gratified at perceiving that the wagon still remained in sight. If it was moving on, it had not yet reached the head of the valley. It may have been halted, to receive some repair? So much the better: we should the sooner overtake it.

On arriving at the butte, the white canvas was still visible; though, from our low position on the plain, only the top of the tilt could be seen.

While Wingrove was unpacking our spare garments I dismounted, and climbed to the summit of the mound—in order to get a better view. I had no difficulty in doing this—for strange to say, a trail runs over the Orphan Butte, from south-east to north-west, regularly aligned with Pike's Peak in the latter direction, and with the Wa-to-yah or *Spanish Peaks* in the former!

But this alignment was not the circumstance that struck me as singular; a far more curious phenomenon came under my observation. The path leading to the summit was entirely clear of the granite blocks that everywhere else covered the declivities of the mound. Between these it passed like a narrow lane, the huge

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prisms lying on each side of it, piled up in a regular trap-like formation, as if placed there by the hand of man!

The latter hypothesis was out of the question. Many of the blocks were a dozen feet in diameter, and tons in weight. Titans alone could have lifted them.

The summit itself was a table of some twenty by forty feet in superficial extent, and seamed by several fissures.

Only by following the path could the summit be reached without great difficulty. The loose boulders rested upon one another, in such fashion that even the most expert climber would have found difficulty in scaling them, and the stunted spreading cedars that grew between their clefts, combined in forming a *chevaux de frise* almost inpenetrable.

I was not permitted to dwell long on the contemplation of this geological phenomenon. On reaching the summit, and directing my telescope up the valley, I obtained a tableau in its field of vision, that almost caused me to drop the glass out of my fingers.

The whole wagon was in view down to its wheel-tracks: and the dark forms were still around it. Some were afoot, others on horseback; and a few appeared to be lying flat along the sward. Whoever these last may have been, I saw at the first glance what the others were. The bronzed skins of naked bodies—the masses of long sweeping hair—the plumed crests and floating drapery—were perfectly apparent in the glass—and all indicating a truth of terrible significance—that the forms thus seen were those of savage men! Yes, both they on horseback and afoot were Indians, beyond a doubt.

And those horizontally extended? They were white men, the owners of the wagons!

This truth flashed on me, as I beheld a fearful object—a body lying head towards me, with its crown, of mottled red and white gleaming significantly through the glass. I had no doubt as to the nature of the object—it was a scalpless skull!

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CHAPTER LII.

RAISING A RAMPART.

I KEPT the telescope to my eye not half the time I have taken telling of it. Quick as I saw that the men stirring around the wagon were Indians, I thought only of screening my body from their sight. To effect this, I dropped down from the summit of the rock—on the opposite side from that facing towards the savages.

Showing only the top of my head, and with the glass once more to my eye, I continued the observation. I now became assured that the victim of the ensanguined skull was a white man—that the other prostrate forms were also the bodies of white men, all dead—all, no doubt, mutilated in like manner. The tableau told its own tale. The presence of the wagon halted, and without horses—one or two dead ones lying under the tongue—the ruck of Indians clustering around it—the bodies stretched along the earth—other objects, boxes and bales, strewed over the sward—all were significant.

The scene explained what we had heard while coming up the cañon. The fusillade had been no fancy, but a fearful reality—fearful in its effects, as I was now satisfied by the testimony of my eyes.

The caravan had been attacked, or more likely, only a single wagon that had been straggling in the rear? The firing may have proceeded from the escort, and the armed emigrants? Indians may have fallen; indeed there were some prostrate forms apart, with a group gathered round them, and those I conjec-

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tured to be the corpses of red men. But it was evident the Indians had proved victorious; since they were still upon the field—still holding the ground and the plunder.

Where were the other wagons of the train?—there were fifty of them—only one was in sight!

It was scarcely possible that the whole caravan had been captured? If so, they must have succumbed within the pass? a fearful massacre must have been made?

This was improbable; the more so, that the Indians around the wagon appeared to number near two hundred. They must have constituted the full band; for it is rare that a war-party is larger. Those seen appeared to be all warriors, naked from the breech-clout upward, their skins glaring with pigments. Neither woman nor child could I see among them.

Had other wagons been captured, then there would not have been so many of the captors clustered round this one.

In all likelihood, the wagon had been coming up behind the others? the animals drawing it had been shot down in the skirmish, and it had fallen into the hands of the successful assailants?

These conjectures occupied me only a moment. Mingled with them was one of still more special import; to whom had belonged the abandoned wagon?

With fearful apprehension, I covered the ground with my glass, straining my sight as I gazed through it. I swept the whole surface of the ground. I looked under the wagon, on both sides of it, and beyond. I sought amidst the masses of dusky forms. I examined the groups and stragglers, even the corpses that strewed the plain. Thank heaven! they were all black or brown or red; all appeared to be men, both the living and the dead—thank Heaven!

The ejaculation ended my survey of the scene; it had scarcely occupied ten seconds of time.

It was interrupted by a sudden movement on the part of the

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savages. Those on horseback were seen separating from the rest, and, the instant after, appeared coming on in the direction of the butte!

The movement was easily accounted for. My imprudence had betrayed our presence. I had been seen while standing on the summit of the mound

I felt regret for my own rashness; but there was no time to indulge in the feeling, and I stifled it. The moment called for action—demanding all the firmness of nerve and coolness of head which, fortunately, I had acquired by experience.

Instead of shouting to my comrades—as yet unconscious of the approaching danger—I remained upon the summit without uttering a word, or showing a sign that might alarm them.

My object in so acting was to avoid the confusion consequent upon a sudden panic, and keep my mind free to think over some plan of escape. The Indians were still five miles off; it would be ten minutes before they could attack us. Two or three of these could be spared for reflection. After that it would be time to call in the council of my companions.

I am here describing in detail, and with the tranquillity of closet retrospect, thoughts that followed one another with the rapidity of lightning flashes. To say that I reflected coolly, would not be true; I was at that moment too much under the influence of fear. I perceived at once that the situation was more than dangerous—it was desperate.

Flight was my first thought, or rather my first instinct; for, on reflection it failed. The idea was to fling off the packs, mount the two pedestrians upon the mules, and gallop back for the cañon.

The conception was good enough, if it could have been carried out: but of this there was no hope. The defile was too distant to be reached in time. The two who might ride the mules could never make it—they must fall by the way.

Even if all could succeed in getting back to the cañon, what

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then? Was it likely we should ever emerge from it? We might for a time defend ourselves within its narrow gorge; but to pass clear through and escape at the other end would be impossible. A party of our pursuers would be certain to take over the ridge, and head us below. To get out there, and reach the woods beyond, would be utterly out of our power; and, without a prospect of reaching the timber, it would be of no use attempting flight.

In the valley around us there was no timbered tract—nothing that deserved the name of a wood; only copses and groves, the largest of which would not have sheltered us for an hour.

I had a reflection. Happy am I now, and proud, that I had the virtue to stifle it. For myself, escape by flight might not have been so problematical. A steed stood near that could have carried me beyond all danger. It only needed to fling myself into the saddle, and ply the spur. Even without that impulsion, my Arab could, and would, have carried me clear.

Death was preferable to the thought. I could only indulge it as a last resort—after all else had failed and fallen. Three men were my companions, true and tried. To all of them I owed some service—to one little less than my life—for the bullet of the eccentric ranger had once saved me from an enemy. It was I who had brought on the impending attack. It was but just I should share its danger; and the thought of shunning it vanished on the instant of its conception.

Escape by flight was hopeless. On the shortest reflection I perceived that our only chance lay in defending ourselves. The chance was not much worth; but there was no alternative. We must stand and fight or fall without resisting. From such a foe as that coming down upon us, we need expect no grace—not a modicum of mercy.

Where was our defence to be made? On the summit of the butte?

There was no better place in sight—no other that could be

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reached, offering so many advantages. Had we chosen it for a point of defence, it could not have promised better for the purpose.

As already stated, the cone was slightly truncated—its top ending in a *mesa*. The table was large enough to hold four of us. By crouching low, or lying flat upon it, we should be screened from the arrows of the Indians or such other weapons as they might use. On the other hand, the muzzles of four guns pointed at *them*, would deter them from approaching the base of the butte.

Scarcely a minute was I in maturing a plan; and I lost less time in communicating it to my companions.

Returning to them as fast as my limbs could carry me, I announced the approach of the Indians.

The announcement produced a surprise sufficiently unpleasant, but no confusion. The old soldiers had been too often under fire to be frightened out of their senses; and the young hunter was not one to give way to a panic. All three remained cool and collected, as they listened to my hurried detail of the plan I had sketched out for our defence.

There was no difficulty about their adopting it—all agreed to it eagerly and at once; in short, there was no alternative.

Up the mound again, this time followed by my three comrades—each of us heavily laden. In addition to our guns and ammunition, we carried our saddles and mule-packs, our blankets and buffalo-robes. It was not their intrinsic value that tempted us to take this trouble with our *impedimenta*; our object was to make with them a rampart on the rock.

We had time for a second trip; and, flinging our first loads up to the table, we rushed back down the declivity.

Each seized upon such articles as offered themselves—valises, the soldiers' knapsacks, joints of the antelope lately killed, and the noted meal-bag—all would avail us.

The animals must be abandoned—both horses and mules. Could we take them up to the summit? Yes, the thing could

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be accomplished, but to what purpose? It would be worse than useless; since it would only render them an aim for the arrows of the enemy, and insure their being shot at once. To leave them below would be the better plan.

A tree stood near the base of the mound. To its branches their bridles had been already looped. There they would be within easy range of our rifles. We could shelter them so long as there was light.

The plan might appear of little advantage; since in the darkness they could be easily taken from us. But in leaving them thus, we were not without some design. We, too, might build a hope on the darkness. If we could succeed in sustaining the attack until nightfall, flight might *then* avail us. In truth, that seemed the only chance we should have of ultimately escaping from our perilous situation.

We resolved, therefore, to look well to the safety of the animals. Though forced to forsake them for a time, we might still keep the enemy off and again recover them.

The contingency was not clear, and we were too much hurried to dwell long upon it. It only flitted before our minds like a gleam of light through the misty future.

I had time to bid farewell to my Arab, to run my fingers along his smooth arching neck, to press my lips to his velvet muzzle. Brave steed! tried and trusty friend! I could have wept at the parting.

He made answer to my caresses; he answered them with a low whimpering neigh. He knew there was something amiss—that there was danger. Our hurried movements had apprised him of it; but the moment after, his altered attitude, his flashing eyes, and the loud snorting from his spread nostrils, told that he perfectly comprehended the danger. He heard the distant trampling of hoofs; he knew that an enemy was approaching.

I heard them myself, and rushed back up the butte. My companions were already upon the summit, busied in building the

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rampart around the rock. I joined them and aided in the work.

Our *paraphernalia* proved excellent for the purpose—light enough to be easily handled, and sufficiently firm to resist either bullets or arrows.

Before the enemy had come within hailing distance, the parapet was completed; and, crouching behind it, we awaited their approach.

CHAPTER LIII.

THE WAR-CRY.

THE war-cry 'How-ow-owgh-aloo-loo-oo!' uttered loudly from a hundred throats, comes pealing down the valley. Its fiendish notes, coupled with the demon-like forms that give voice to them, are well calculated to quail the stoutest heart.

Ours are not without fear. Though we know that the danger is not immediate, there is a significance in the tones of that wild slogan. They express more than the usual hostility of red to white—they breathe a spirit of vengeance.

The gestures of menace—the brandished spears and bended bows—the war-clubs waving in the air—are all signs of the excited anger of the Indians. Blood has been spilled—perhaps the blood of some of their chosen warriors—and ours will be sought to a certainty. We perceive no signs of a pacific intent—no semblance that would lead us to hope for mercy. The foe is bent on our destruction. He rushes forward to kill.

I have said that the danger was not immediate. I did not conceive it so. My conception was based upon experience. I had met the prairie Indians before—in the south; but north or south, I knew that their tactics were the same.

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It is a mistake to suppose that these savages rush recklessly upon death. Only when their enemy is far inferior to them in numbers—or otherwise an undermatch—will they advance boldly to the fight. They will do this in an attack upon Mexicans, whose prowess they despise; or sometimes in a conflict with their own kind, when stimulated by warrior pride, and the promptings of the tribal vendetta. On other occasions, they are sufficiently careful of their skins—more especially in an encounter with the white trappers, or even travellers who enter the prairies from the east. Of all other weapons they dread the long rifle of the hunter. It is only after stratagem has failed—when *do or die* becomes a necessity—that the horse-Indian can bring himself to charge forward upon the glistening barrel. The mere hope of plunder will not tempt even the boldest of red-skinned robbers within the circle of a rifle's range. They all know from experience the deadliness of its aim.

Most probably plunder had been their motive for attacking the train: but their victims could only have been some straggling unfortunates, too confident in their security. They had not succumbed without a struggle. The death of all of them proved this—for not a prisoner appeared to have been taken. Further evidence of it was seen upon the sward; for, as the crowd scattered, I had seen through the glass several corpses that were not those of white men. The robbers, though victorious, had suffered severely; hence the vengeful yells with which they were charging down upon us.

With all their menace, both of signs and sounds, I had no fear of their charging up to the mound, nor yet to its base. There were fifty yards around it within range of our guns, and the first who should venture within this circle would not be likely to go forth from it alive.

'Not a shot is to be fired till you are sure of hitting! Do not one of you pull trigger, till you have sighted your man!'

On the skill of two of my comrades I could confide—on Sure

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shot with all the certainty which his *sobriquet* expressed; and I had seen enough of the young hunter, to know how he handled his rifle. About the Irishman alone was there a doubt—only of his coolness and his aim—of his courage there was none. In this the 'infantry' was perhaps equal to any of us.

The words of caution had scarcely parted from my lips, when the enemy came galloping up. Their yelling grew louder as they advanced; and its echoes ringing from the rocks, appeared to double the number of their wild cries.

We could only hear one another by calling out at the top of our voices; but we had little to say. The time for talking had expired; that of action had arrived.

On come the whooping savages, horrid to behold: their faces arms, and bodies frightfully painted, each after his own device, and all as hideous as savage conception could suggest. The visages of bears, wolves, and other fierce animals are depicted on their breasts and shields—with the still more horrid emblems of the death's head, the cross-bones, and the red hand. Even their horses are covered with similar devices—stained upon their skins in ochre, charcoal, and vermilion. The sight is too fearful to be fantastic.

On they come, uttering their wild 'Howgh-owgh-aloo!' brandishing their various weapons, and making their shields of *parfleche* rattle by repeated strokes against their clubs and spears—on comes the angry avalanche!

They are within a hundred yards of the butte. For a moment we are in doubt. If they charge up the declivity, we are lost men. We may shoot down the foremost, but they are twenty to one. In a hand-to-hand struggle we shall be overwhelmed—killed or captured—in less than sixty seconds of time!

'Hold your fire!' I cried, seeing my comrades lie with their cheeks against the guns; 'not yet! only two at a time—but not yet! Ha! as I expected.'

And just as I had expected, the wild ruck came to a halt—

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those in the lead drawing up their horses as suddenly as if they had arrived upon the edge of a precipice!

They had come to a stand just in the nick of time. Had they advanced but five paces further, at least two of their number would have tumbled out of their saddles. Sure-shot and I had each selected our man, and agreed about the signal. The others were ready to follow.

All four barrels resting over the rampart had caught the eyes of the Indians. A glance at the glistening tubes was sufficient. True to their old tactics, it was the sight of these that had halted them!

CHAPTER LIV.

THE RED HAND.

The whooping and screaming are for a while suspended. Those in the rear have ridden up; and the struggling cavalcade becomes massed upon the plain, at less than two hundred yards' distance from the butte.

Shouts are still heard, and talking in an unknown tongue; but not the dread war-cry. That has failed of its effect; and is heard no longer.

Now and then, young warriors gallop toward the butte, vaunt their valour, brandish their weapons, shoot off their arrows, and threaten us by word and gesture. All, however, keep well outside the perilous circumference protected by our guns.

We perceive that they, too, have guns, both muskets and rifles—in all, a dozen or more. We can tell that they are empty. Those who carry them are dismounting to load. We may expect soon to receive their fire, but from the clumsy way in which they

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handle their pieces, that need not terrify us—any more than their arrows, already sent, and falling far short.

Half-a-dozen horsemen are conspicuous. They are chiefs, as can be told by the eagle plumes sticking in their hair, with the insignia on their breasts and bodies. These have ridden to the front, and are grouped together, their horses standing head to head. Their speeches and gestulations declare that they are holding council.

The movements of menace are no longer made. We have time to examine our enemies. They are so near that I need scarcely level the glass upon them; though through that, I can note every feature with minute distinctness.

They are not Comanches—their bodies are too big, and their limbs too long, for these Ishmaelites of the southern plains. Neither are they of the Jicarilla Apache: they are too noble-looking to resemble these skulking jackals. More like are they to the Cayüas? But no—they are not Cayüas. I have met these Indians, and would know them. The war-cry did not resemble theirs. Theirs is the war-cry of the Comanche. I should have known it at once. Cheyennes they may be—since it is their especial ground? Or might it be that tribe of still darker, deadlier fame—the hostile Arapaho? If they be Arapahoes, we need look for no mercy.

I sweep the glass over them, seeking for signs by which I may identify our enemy. I perceive one that is significant. The leggings of the chiefs and principal warriors are fringed with scalps; the shields are encircled by similar ornaments. Most of these appendages are of dark hue—the locks long and black. But not all are of this kind and colour.

One shield is conspicuously different from the rest. A red hand is painted upon its black disc. It is the *totem* of him who carries it. A thick fringe of hair is set around its rim. The tufts are of different lengths and colours. There are tresses brown, blonde, and even red; hair curled and wavy; coarse

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hair; and some soft and silky. Through the glass, I see all this, with a clearness that leaves no doubt as to the character of these varied *chevelures*. They are the scalps of white men?

And the red-hand upon the shield? a red hand? Ah! I remember—there is a noted chief of the name, famed for his hostility to the trappers—famed for a ferocity unequalled among his race—a savage who is said to take delight in torturing his captives—especially if it be a pale face who has had the misfortune to fall into his hands. Can it be that fiend—the Red-Hand of the Arapahoes?

The appearance of the man confirms my suspicion. A body, tall, angular, and ill-shaped, scarred with cicatrized wounds and bent with age; a face seamed with the traces of evil passion; eyes deep sunken in their sockets, and sparkling like coals of fire—an aspect more fiendish than human! All this agrees with the descriptions I have had of the Red-Hand chief. Assuredly it is he.

Our enemies, then, are the Arapahoes—their leader the dreaded *Red-Hand*.

'Great God! have mercy upon us. These men will have none.'

Such was the ejaculation that escaped my lips, on recognising, or believing that I recognized, the foe that was before us.

The Red-Hand was seen to direct. He was evidently leader of the band. All seemed obedient to his signal; all moved with military promptness at his word or nod. Beyond doubt, it was the Red-Hand and his followers, who for crimes and cold-blooded atrocities were noted as he. A dreaded band, long known to the traders of Santa Fe—to the *ciboleros* from the Taos Valley—to the trappers of the Arkansas and Platte.

We were not the first party of white men besieged by these barbarous robbers; and if it was our fate to fall, we should not be the first victims. Many a brave 'mountain-man' had already got into their fiendish grasp. Scarcely a trapper who could not

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tell of some comrade, who had been 'rubbed' out by Red Hand and his 'Rapahoes.'

The council of the savage crowd continues for some time. Some *ruse* is being devised and debated.

With palpitating hearts we await the issue.

I have made known my suspicions as to who is our enemy, and cautioned my comrades to be on their guard. I have told them that, if my conjecture prove true, we need look for no mercy.

The talk is at an end. Red-Hand is about to address us.

Riding two lengths in front of his followers, the savage chief makes halt. His shield is held conspicuously upward—its convexity towards us—not for any purpose of security; but evidently that we may see its device, and know the bearer. Red-Hand is conscious of the terror inspired by his name.

In his other hand he carries an object better calculated than his shield to beget fearful emotions. Poised on the point of his long spear, and held high aloft, are the scalps recently taken. There are six of them in the bunch—easily told by the different hues of the hair; and all easily identified as those of white men. They are the scalps of the slain teamsters, and others who vainly attempted to defend the captured wagon. They are all fresh and gory—hang limber along the shaft—the blood is not yet dry upon them—the wet surface glitters in the sun!

We view them with singular emotions—mine more singular than any: I endeavour to identify some of those ghastly trophies. I am but too satisfied at failing.

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CHAPTER LV.

AN ILL-TIMED SHOT.

'HABLO CASTELLANO?' cries the savage chieftain in broken Spanish.

I am not surprised at being addressed in this language by a prairie Indian. Many of them speak Spanish, or its North Mexican *patois*. They have opportunities of learning it from the New Mexican traders, but better—*from their captives*.

'*Si, cavallero*, I speak Spanish. What wishes the warrior with the red hand upon his shield?'

'The pale-face is a stranger in this country, else he would not ask such a question? What wishes the Red-Hand? Ha, ha, ha! The scalps of the white men—their scalps and lives—that is the will of the Arapaho.'

The speech is delivered in a tone of exultation, and accompanied by a scornful laugh. The savage is proud of his barbarous and bloodthirsty character: he glories in the terror of his name. With such a monster, it seems idle to hold parley. In the end, it will be only to fight, and if defeated, to die.

But the drowning man cannot restrain himself from catching even at straws.

'Arapaho! we are not your enemies! Why should you desire to take our lives? We are peaceful travellers passing through your country; and have no wish to quarrel with our red brothers.'

'Red brothers! ha, ha, ha! Tongue of a serpent, and heart of a hare! The proud Arapaho is not your brother: he dis-

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claims kindred with a pale face. Red-Hand has no brothers among the whites; all are alike his enemies! Behold their scalps upon his shield! Ha! See the fresh trophies upon his spear! Count them! There are six! There will be ten Before the sun goes down, the scalps of the four squaws skulking on the mound will hang from the spears of the Arapahoes!

I could not contradict the declaration: it was too fearfully probable.

I made no reply.

'Dogs!' fiercely vociferated the savage, 'come down, and deliver up your arms.'

'An' our scalps too, I s'pose,' muttered the Yankee. 'Neo, certingly not, at thet price; I don't sell my notions so dirt cheep as thet comes to. 'Twouldn't pay nohow. Lookee yeer, old red chops!' continued he in a louder voice, and raising his head above the rampart—'this heer o' mine air vallable, do ee see? It air a dear colour, an' a putty colour. It 'ud look jest the thing on thet shield o' yourn; but 'tain't there yet, not by a long chalk; an' I kalklate ef ye want the skin o' my head, ye'll hev to trot up an' take it.

'Ugh!' ejaculated the Indian with an impatient gesture. 'The yellow squaw is not worth the words of a chief. His scalp is not for the shield of the warrior. It will be given to the dogs of our tribe—it will be thrown to the jackals of the prairie.'

'Ain't partickler abeout what 'ee do wi' 't—thet is, efter ye've got it. Don't ye wish 'ee may git it? eh?'

'Wagh!' exclaimed the savage, with another impatient gesticulation. 'The Red-Hand is tired talking. One word more. Listen to it, chief of the pale face! Come down, and deliver up your fire-weapons? The Red-Hand will be merciful: he wil spare your lives. If you resist, he will torture you with fire. The knives of his warriors will hew the living flesh from your bones. You shall die a thousand deaths; and the Great Spirit of the Arapahoes will smile at the sacrifice.'

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'And what if we do not resist?'

'Your lives shall be spared. The Red-Hand declares it on the faith of a warrior.'

'Faith o' a warrior!—faith o' a cut-throat! he only wants to come round us, capting, an' git our scalps 'ithout fightin' for 'em—thet's what the red verming wants to be at—sure as shootin'.'

'Why should the Red-Hand spare our lives?' I inquired taken by surprise at any offer of life coming from such a quarter. 'Has he has not just said, that all white men are his enemies?'

'True. But white men may become his friends. He wants white men for his allies. He has in purpose.'

'Will the Red-Hand declare his purpose?'

'Willingly. His people have taken many fire-weapons. See! they are yonder in the hands of his braves, who know not how to use them. Our enemies—the Utahs—have been taught by the white hunters; and the ranks of the Arapaho warriors are thinned by their deadly bullets. If the pale-faced chief and his three followers will consent to dwell with the band of Red-Hand, and teach his warriors the great medicine of the fire-weapon, their lives shall be spared. The Red-Hand will honour the young soldier-chief, and the White Eagle of the forest.'

'Soldier-chief! White Eagle of the forest! How can he have known'——

'If you resist,' continued he, interrupting my reflections, 'the Red-Hand will keep his word. You have no chance of escape. You are but four, and the Arapaho warriors are numerous as the trees of the Big Timber. If one of them falls by your fire-weapons, he shall be revenged. The Red-Hand repeats what he has said: the knives of his braves will hew the living flesh from your bones. You shall die a thousand deaths, and the Great Spirit of the Arapahoes will smile at the sacrifice!'

'Be Jaysis, cyaptin!' cried O'Tigg, who, not understanding

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Spanish, was ignorant of what was said, 'that ugly owld Indyian wants a bit ov cowld lid through him. In troth I b'lave the musket moight raich him. She belonged to Sargent Johnson, and was considhered the best gun about the Fort. What iv I throy her carry on the ridskin? Say the word, yer honour, an here goes!'

So astounded was I at the last words of the Arapaho chief, that I paid no heed to what the Irishman was saying. I had turned towards Wingrove—not for an explanation: for the young hunter, also ignorant of the language in which the Indian spoke, was unaware of the allusion that had been made to him. I had commenced translating the speech; but before three words had escaped from my lips, the loud bang of the musket drowned every other sound; and a cloud of sulphury smoke covering the whole platform, hindered us from seeing one another!

It needed no explanation. The Irishman had taken my silence for consent: he had fired.

From the thick of the smoke came his exulting shout:

'Hurray! he's down—be my sówl! he's down. I knew the owld musket 'ud raich him! Hooray!'

The report reverberated from the rocks—mingling its echoes with the wild vengeful cries that rose up from the plain.

In an instant, the smoke was wafted aside; and the painted warriors were once more visible.

The Red-Hand was erect upon his feet, standing by the side of his horse, and still holding his spear and shield. The horse was down—stretched along the turf, and struggling in the throes of death!

'Be gorrah! cyaptin! wasn't it a splindid shot?'

'A shot that may cost us our scalps,' said I: for I saw that there was no longer any chance of a pacific arrangement—even upon the condition of our making sharpshooters of every redskin in the tribe.

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'Ha, ha, ha!' came the wild laugh of the Arapaho. 'Vengeance on the pale-faced traitors! vengeance!'

And shaking his clinched fist in the air the savage chief retired among his warriors.

CHAPTER LVI.

ATTEMPT TO STAMPEDE.

We make an attempt to re-open the interrupted parley. In vain. Whatever amicable design the Red-Hand may have conceived, is now changed to a feeling of the most deadly hostility. There is no more talk to be drawn from him—not a word. In the midst of his warriors, he stands scowling and silent. None of the chiefs speak. The common braves make answers to our overtures: but only by the insult of a peculiar gesture. Any hopes we may have conceived of a pacific termination to the encounter die within us as we note the behaviour of the band.

Whether the Indian was in earnest in the proposal he had made, or whether it was a mere scheme to get our scalps without fighting for them, we could not tell at the time. There was an air of probability that he was honest about the matter; but, on the other hand, his notorious character for hostility to the white race contradicted this probability. I had heard, moreover, that this same chief was in the habit of adopting such plans to get white men into his power.

We had no time to speculate upon the point; nor yet upon that which puzzled us far more—how he had arrived at the knowledge of who we were! What could he have known of the 'White Eagle of the forest,' or the 'young soldier chief?'

So far as I was myself concerned, the title might have been explained My uniform—I still wore it—might have been espied

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upon the prairies. The Indians are quick at catching an appellation, and communicating it to one another. But the figurative sobriquet of the young hunter? That was more specific. The Red-Hand could not have used it accidentally. Impossible. It bespoke a knowledge of us, and our affairs, that appeared mysterious and inexplicable. It did not fail to recall to our memory the apparition that had astonished Wingrove in the morning.

There was no opportunity to canvass the question—only time for the most vague conjectures—before the savages began to fire at us—discharging in rapid succession the guns which they had loaded.

We soon perceived that we had little to fear from this sort of attack. Unless by some stray bullet, there was not much danger of their hitting us. Their clumsy *manège* of the fire-weapons was evident enough. It added to the probability, that the chief had been in earnest about our giving instructions to his warriors.

Still was there some degree of danger. The guns they had got hold of were large ones—most of them old muskets of heavy calibre—that cast their ounces of lead to a long distance. We heard their bullets pattering against the rocks, and one or two of them had gone whistling over our heads. It was just possible to get hit; and to avoid such an accident we crouched behind our parapet as closely as if we had been screening ourselves from the most expert marksmen.

For a long time, we did not return their fire. O'Tigg was desirous of trying another shot with his piece, but I forbade it. Warned by what they had witnessed, the Indians had retired beyond even the range of the sergeant's fusil.

Two parties of savages now separate from the main body; and, taking opposite directions, go sweeping at full gallop round the butte. We divine their object. They have discovered the position of our animals: the intention is to *stampede* them.

We perceive the importance of preventing this If we can but keep our animals out of the hands of the savages until

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darkness comes down, then may there be some prospect of our escaping by flight. True, it is only a faint hope. There are many contingencies by which our design may be defeated, but there are also circumstances to favor it; and to yield without a struggle would only be to deliver ourselves into the hands of an unpitying foe. The last words uttered by the Arapaho chief have warned us that death will be preferable to captivity.

We are sustained by another remembrance.

We know that we are not the first white men who have been thus surrounded, and who afterwards contrived to escape. Many a small band of brave trappers have sustained the attack of a whole Indian tribe; and though half of their number may have fallen, the others lived to relate the perilous adventure. The life of a determined man is difficult to take. A desperate sortie often proves the safest defence; and three or four resolute arms will cut a loophole of escape through a host of enemies.

Some such thoughts flitting before us, hindered us in that hour from succumbing to despair.

It was of the utmost importance, then, to prevent our animals from being swept off; and to this end were our energies now directed. Three of us faced towards them—leaving the fourth to watch the movements of the enemy on the other side of the butte.

Once more the wild cry rings among the rocks, as the red horsemen gallop around—rattling their shields, and waving their weapons high in air. This is done to affright our animals, and cause them to break from their fastenings.

These demonstrations have not the desired effect. The mules prance and hinnie; the horses neigh and bound over the grass; but the long boughs bend without breaking; and acting as elastic springs, give full play to the affrighted animals. Not a rein snaps, not a lazo breaks, not a loop slides from its hold!

The first skurry is over; and we are gratified to see the four quadrupeds still grouped around the tree, and fast as ever to its branches.

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The *stampede* has proved a failure.

Another swoop of the wild horsemen ends with like result; and then another.

And now closer and closer they come—galloping in all directions, crossing and meeting, and wheeling and circling—with shrill screams and violent gesticulations.

As they pass near, they hide behind the bodies of their horses An arm over the withers, a leg above the croup—are all of the riders we can see. It is useless to fire at these. The horses we might tumble over at pleasure; but the men offer no point to aim at. A red face gleams through the tossing locks of the mane; but, ere we can take sight upon it, it is jerked away.

For a considerable time this play was kept up—the Indians all the while yelling as if engaged in some terrible conflict. As to ourselves, we were too wary to waste our shots upon the horses, and we reserved them, in the hope of being able, to 'draw a bead' on some rider more reckless than the rest.

The opportunity soon offered. Two of the savages exhibited a special determination to succeed. Knife in hand, they careered around—evidently with the design of cutting the bridles and lazoes. Cheered on by the shouts of their comrades, they grew less careful of their skins, and at length make a dash towards the *cavallada* under the tree. When almost within hand-reach of the fastenings by which the mules were held, one of the latter slewed suddenly round, and sent her heels in a well-directed fling against the head of the foremost horse. The steed instantly wheeled, and the other coming behind followed the same movement—exposing both the riders to our aim. They made an effort to throw themselves to the other side of their horses; but the opportunity was lost. Our rifles were too quick for them. Two of us fired at the same instant; and as the smoke cleared away, the red robbers were seen sprawling upon the plain.

Our shots had proved fatal. Before we could reload, the

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struggles of the fallen horsemen had ended; and both lay motionless upon the grass.

The lesson was sufficient for the time. Warned by the fate of their comrades, the Indians, although still continuing their noisy demonstrations, now kept well out of the range of our rifles. There appeared to be no others in the band desirous of achieving fame at such risk of life.

CHAPTER LVII.

OUR WEAK POINT.

The savage horsemen continued their circling gallop around the butte—one occasionally swooping nearer; but covered by the body of his horse, in such a way that it was impossible to sight him.

These manœuvres were executed by the young warriors, apparently in a spirit of bravado, and with the design of showing off their courage and equestrian skill. We disregarded the harmless demonstrations—watching them only when made in the direction of our animals.

At intervals, a hideous face, peeping over the withers of a horse, offered a tempting target. My comrades would have tried a flying shot had I not restrained them. A miss would have damaged our prestige in the eyes of the enemy. It was of importance that they should continue to believe in the infallibility of the fire weapon.

After a time we observed a change of tactics. The galloping slackened, and soon came to an end. The horsemen threw themselves into small groups, at nearly equal distances apart, and forming a ring around the butte. Most of the riders dismounted,

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a few only remaining upon their horses, and continuing to dash backward and forward, from group to group.

These groups were beyond the range of our rifles, though not of the sergeant's musket. But the savages—both mounted and afoot—had taken care to make ramparts of their horses.

At first this manœuvre of our enemies appeared to have no other object than that of placing themselves in a position to guard against our retreat.

A moment's reflection, however, told us that this could not be the design. There were but two points by which we could pass down to the plain—at the two ends of the trail—why then should they *surround* the butte?

It could not be for the purpose of cutting off our retreat? That could be done as effectually without the circular deployment.

Their design soon became apparent. We observed that the muskets were distributed among the groups—three or four to each. With these they now opened fire upon us from all sides at once—keeping it up as fast as they could load the pieces.

The effect was to render our situation a little more perilous. Not having the means to make our parapet continuous, we were at several points exposed. Had we had good marksmen to deal with, we should have been in danger. As it was we drew well back towards the centre of the platform: and were screened by its outer angles.

Now and then a shot struck the rock, sending the splinters in our faces; but all four of us escaped being hit by the bullets.

We had made an observation that rendered us uneasy: we had observed a weak point in our defence. We wondered that our assailants had not also noticed it.

Around the butte, and close up to its base, lay many boulders of rock. They were prisms of granite that had become detached from the cairn itself, and rolled down its declivity. They rested upon the plain, forming a ring co-centric with the circular base of the mound. Many of these boulders had a diameter of six

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feet, and would have sheltered the body of a man from our shots Still others rested along the sloping sides of the butte—also of prismatic shape, with sides overhanging. These would form ramparts for our assailants. Even the spreading cedars would hide a human form from sight. They were the trailing juniper of the western wilds—very different from the Virginian cedar. They were of broad bushy forms, with stunted stems, and tortuous branches, densely set with a dark acetalous foliage. They covered the sides of the butte, from base to middle height with a draping perfectly impenetrable to the eye. Though there was no path save that already mentioned, assailants, as active as ours, might easily have scaled the declivity.

Should the Indians make a bold dash up to the base of the butte, then drop their horses, and take to the rocks, they might advance upon us without risk. While working their way up the slope, they would be safe from our shots, sheltered by the projecting boulders, and screened by the trees. We should not dare to expose ourselves over the edge of the platform, since others, remaining behind the rocks below, would cover us with their aim; and the shower of arrows would ensure our destruction. Those who should scale the mound, would have us at their mercy. Assailing us simultaneously from all sides, and springing upon the platform, ten to one against us, they would soon overpower us!

This was the observation we had made, and the reflection that resulted from it. We only wondered that our enemies had not yet perceived the advantage of this plan of attack, and since they had neglected it so long, we were in hopes that the design would not occur to them.

We soon perceived our error, and that we had miscalculated the cunning of our dusky foes We saw the Indians once more taking to their horses. Some order had reached them from the Red-Hand, who stood conspicuous in the midst of the largest group of his warriors.

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The movement set on foot by this order was similar to that already practised in the endeavor to stampede our animals; but now all the band took part in it—even the chiefs mounting and riding among the rest. The marksmen alone remained afoot, and continued to fire from behind their horses.

Once more the mounted warriors gallop in circles round the butte. We perceived that at each wheel they were coming nearer, and could divine their intent. It was the very plan of attack we had been apprehending. We could tell by their gestures that they were about to charge forward to the butte.

Regardless of the fire from the plain, we crept back to the edge of the parapet, and pointed our pieces towards the circling horsemen. We were excited with new apprehensions; but the caution to keep cool was passed around; and each resolved not to fire without being certain of his aim. On our first shots would depend the success or failure of the attack.

As before, we arranged that two only should fire at a time. If the shots should prove true, and two of our foes fall to them, it might check the charge, perhaps repulse it altogether. Such often happens with an onset of Indians—on whom the dread of the fire-weapon acts with a mysterious effect.

On the other hand, should we miss, our fate was sealed and certain. We should not even have the choice of that last desperate resort on which we had built a hope. We should be cut off from all escape, for our animals would be gone before we could reach them. On foot, it would be idle to attempt flight; even could we have run the gantlet through their line, we knew they would overtake us upon the plain.

We felt like men about to throw dice for our lives, and dice too that were loaded against us.

Nearer and nearer they come, until they are coursing within fifty yards of the butte, and scarcely twice that distance from our guns. Were their bodies uncovered we could reach them;

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but we see only their hands, feet, and faces—the latter only at intervals.

They draw nearer—now they are riding within the circle of danger. Our elevation gives us the advantage. We begin to see their bodies over the backs of the horses. A little nearer yet, and some of these horses will go riderless over the plain.

They have perceived their danger—one and all of them Notwithstanding their cries of bravado, and mutual encouragement, they dread to make the final rush. Each fears that himself may be the victim.

Our heads were growing dizzy with watching them, and we were still expecting to see some of them turn their horses, and dash inward to the butte; when we heard a signal-cry circulating through their ranks. All at once the foremost of them was seen swerving off to the plain, followed by the whole troop!

Before we could recover from our surprise, they had galloped far beyond the range of our guns, and once more come to a halt!

CHAPTER LVIII.

A RAMPART ON WHEELS.

For a time, our hearts throbbed more lightly: the pressure of apprehension was removed. We fancied the savages had either not yet become fully aware of the advantages of storming our position, or that the certainty of losing some of their number had intimidated them from making the attempt. They had abandoned their design, whatever it was; and intended waiting for night—the favourite fighting-time of the Indian.

This was just what we desired; and we were congratulating ourselves that the prospect had changed in our favor.

Our joy was short-lived: the enemy showed no sign of repose

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Clustered upon the plain, they still kept to their horses. By this we knew that some other movement was intended.

The chiefs were again in the centre of the crowd—the Red Hand conspicuous. He was heard haranguing his warriors, though we could not guess the purport of his speech. His gesture told of fierce rage—his glances now and then directed towards us betokened a spirit of implacable vengeance.

At the conclusion of his speech, he waved his hand in the direction of the wagon. The gesture appeared to be the accompaniment of a command. It was promptly and instantly obeyed. A dozen horsemen dashed out from the group, and galloped off. Their course was directed up the valley—towards the scene of their late strife.

Those who had remained upon the ground dismounted, and gave their horses to the grass. This might have led us to anticipate a suspension of hostilities, but it did not. The attitude of our enemies was not that of purposed repose. On the contrary, they came together afoot; and engaged in what appeared to be an eager consultation. The chiefs spoke in turn. Some new scheme was being discussed.

We watched the party who had ridden off. As anticipated, the wagon proved to be the *butt* of their excursion. Having reached it, they halted; and, dismounting, became grouped around it.

It was impossible for some time to tell what they were doing. Even the glass did not reveal the nature of their movements. There were others besides those who rode up; and the white tilt appeared in the midst of a dark cluster of men and horses.

Their errand at length became obvious. The crowd was seen to scatter. Horses appeared harnessed to the tongue—the wheels were in motion—the vehicle was turning round upon the plain. We saw that some half-dozen horses were hitched on, with men seated upon their backs as teamsters.

They make a wheel, and head down the valley in the direction

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of the butte. They are seen urging the animals into a rapid pace; and the wagon no longer loaded leaps lightly over the smooth sward. The horses are spurred into a gallop; and amidst the shouts of the savage drivers, drag the huge vehicle after them with the rough rapidity of a mountain howitzer.

In a few minutes, it advances to the ground occupied by the dismounted band, who surround it upon its arrival.

We upon the summit have a full view of all. We recognise the well know Troy wagon—with its red wheels, blue body, and ample canvas roof. The lettering, 'TROY, NEW YORK,' is legible on the tilt—a strange sight in the midst of its present possessors!

What can be their object with the wagon!

Their actions leave us not long in doubt. The horses are unharnessed and led aside. Half-a-dozen savages are seen crouching under the axles, and laying hold of the spokes. As many more stand behind—screened from our sight by the tilt-cloth, the body and boxing. The pole projects in the direction of the mound.

Their object is now too painfully apparent. Without thinking of the analogy of the Trojan horse, we see that this monster of a modern Troy is about to be employed for a similar purpose.

Yes—shielded by the thick planking of its bed—by its head and hind boards—by its canvas covering and other cloths which they have cunningly spread along its sides, the savages may approach the mound in perfect safety. Such is their design.

With dismay, we perceive it. We can do nought either to retard or hinder its execution. Those under the vehicle can 'spoke the wheels forward, without in the least exposing their bodies to our aim. Even their hands and arms are not visible: buffalo robes and blankets hang over, draping the wheels from our sight. Those behind are equally well screened; and can push forward th huge machine, without risk of danger.

We note all these circumstances with feelings of keen appre

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hension. We adopt no means to hinder the movement: we can think of none, since none is possible. We are paralysed by a sense of our utter helplessness.

We are allowed but little time to reflect upon it. Amidst the shouts of the savages, we hear the creaking of the wheels; we behold the mass in motion!

Onward it comes towards the mound—advancing with apparently spontaneous motion, as of some living monster—some horrid mammoth approaching to destroy and devour us! . . .

Had it been such a monster, its approach could not have inspired us with a greater dread. We felt that our destruction was equally certain. The savages would now surround us—advance up the rocks—spring upon us from all sides at once; and, although we might fight to the death—which we had determined to do—still must we die. The knowledge that we should die fighting, and with arms in our hands—that we should fall upon the corpses of our enemies, avenging death before parting with life—this knowledge was but a feeble ray to support and cheer us. Though no cowards—not one of us—we could not look forward to our fate, without a feeling of dread.

The certainty of that fate we could no longer question. Even the time seemed to be fixed. In a few minutes, the assailants would be upon us; and we should be engaged in the last struggle of our lives, without the slightest hope of saving them.

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CHAPTER LIX.

THE ASSAULT

With the prospect of such fatal issue—so proximate as to seem already present—no wonder that our hearts were dismayed at sight of the wagon moving towards us. As the inhabitants of a leaguered city behold with fear the advance of the screened catapult or mighty 'ram,' so regarded we the approach of that familiar vehicle—now a very monster in our eyes.

We were not permitted to view the spectacle in perfect security. As the wagon moved forward, those who carried the muskets drew still nearer under cover of their horses, and once more played upon us their uncertain but dangerous shower. With the bullets hissing above and around us, we were forced to lie low—only at intervals raising our heads to note the progress of the party intended to storm.

Slowly but surely the machine moved on—its wheels turning under the impulse of brawny arms—and impelled forward by pressure from behind. To fire upon it would have been of no avail; our bullets would have been thrown away. As easily might they have pierced through a stockade of tree-trunks.

O for a howitzer! but one discharge of iron grape to have crushed through those planks of oak and ash—to have scattered in death that human machinery that was giving them motion.

Slowly and steadily it moved on—stopping only as some large pebble opposed itself to the wheel—then on again as the obstacle was surmounted—on till the intervening space was passed over, and the triumphant cheer of our savage foes announced the attainment of their object.

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Risking the straggling shots, we looked over. The wagon had reached the base of the butte; its tongue was forced up among the trees—its body stood side by side with the granite prisms.

The storming-party no longer required it as a shield; they would be sufficiently sheltered by the great boulders; and to these they now betook themselves, passing from one to the other until they had accomplished a complete surround of the butte.

We observed this movement, but could not prevent it. They flitted from rock to rock, like red spectres; and with the rapidity of lightning flashes. In vain we attempted to take aim; before a brrrel could be brought to bear upon them, they were gone out of sight. We ourselves, galled by the leader hail, were forced to withdraw behind our ramparts.

A moment of suspense followed. We knew not how to act; we were puzzled by their movements, as well as by the silence in which they were making them.

Did they intend to climb up the butte, and openly attack us? What else should be their design? What other object could they have in surrounding it?

Only about a dozen had approached under cover of the wagon Was it likely that so few of them would assail us boldly and openly? No. Beyond a doubt, they had some other design?

Ha! what means that blue column slowly curling upward? It is smoke!

See! Another and another—a dozen of them! From all sides they spring up, encircling the mound.

Hark to those sounds: the 'swish' of burning grass—the crackle of kindling sticks! They are making fires around us!

The columns were at first filmy, and then grew thicker and more dense. They spread out and joined each other—they became attracted towards the rocky mass—they fell against its sides, and wreathing upward, wrapped its summit in their ramifications. The platform was soon enveloped in the cloud!

We saw the savages upon the plain—dimly, as if through a

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crape. Those behind their horses still continued their fire; the others were dismounting.

They abandoned their horses, and appeared to advance on foot; their forms, through the magnifying mist, loomed spectral and gigantic!

They were visible only for a moment. The smoke rolled its thick volume around the summit, and shrouded them from our sight.

We no longer saw our enemy or the earth. The sky was obscured—even the rock on which we stood was no longer visible, nor one of us to the other!

Through all continued the firing upon the plain; the bullets hurtled around our heads, and the clamour of our foe reached our ears with fierce thrilling import.

We heard the crackling of fagots, and the spurting hissing noise of many fires; but perceived no blaze—only the thick smoke rising in continuous waves, and every moment growing denser around us.

We could bear it no longer; we were half suffocated. Any form of death before that. Was it too late to reach our horses? Doubtless, they were already snatched away. No matter: we could not remain there. In five minutes, we must have yielded to the fearful asphyxia.

'No! never! let us die as we had determined, with arms in our hands!'

Voices husky and hoarse made answer in the affirmative.

We sprang to our feet, and came together—so that we could feel each other. We grasped our guns and got ready our knives and pistols. We made our way to the edge of the rock, and, sliding down, assured ourselves of the path. We groped downward, guided by the granite walls on each side. We went not with caution, but in the very recklessness of a desperate need We were met by the masses of smoke still rolling upwards. Further down, we felt the caloric as we came nearer to the crackling fires.

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We heeded them not, but rushed madly forward, till we had cleared both the cloud and the flames, and stood in the open air.

It was but escaping from the fires of hell to rush into the midst of its demons. On all sides, they surrounded us with poised spears and brandished clubs. Amidst their loud yells, we scarcely heard the cracking of our guns and pistols; and those who fell to our shots were soon lost to our sight behind the bodies of others who crowded forward to encompass us.

For a short while, we kept together, and fought, back to back, facing our foes; but we were soon separated; and each struggled with a dozen assailants around him.

The struggle was not protracted. So far as I was concerned, it ended almost on the instant of my being separated from my comrades. A blow from behind, as of a club striking me upon the skull, deprived me of conciousness, leaving me only the one last thought—*that it was death!*

CHAPTER LX.

A CAPTIVE ON A CRUCIFIX.

Am I dead? Surely it *was* death, or an oblivion that equalled it?

But no—I live! I am conscious that I live. Light is falling upon my eyes—thought is returning to my soul!

Am I upon earth? or is it another world in which I awake?

It is a bright world—with a sky of blue, and a sun of gold; but are they the sky and sun of the earth? Both may belong to a future world?

I can see no earth—neither fields, nor trees, nor rocks, nor water—nought but the blue canopy and the golden orb. Where is the earth?

It should be under and around me, but I cannot see it

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Neither around nor beneath can I look—only upward and forward—only upon the sun and the sky!

What hinders me from turning? Is it that I sleep and dream? Is the incubus of a horrid nightmare upon me? Am I, like Prometheus, chained to a rock, face upward?

No—not thus: I feel that I am standing—erect as if nailed to a wall!

If I am not dreaming, I am certainly in this attitude. I feel my limbs beneath me; and my arms appear to be stretched out to their full extent, and held as in the grasp of some invisible hand! My head, too, is fixed: I can neither turn nor move it: a cord traverses across my cheeks. There is something between my teeth. A piece of wood it appears to be? It gags me, and half stifles my breathing!

Am I in human hands? or are they fiends who are thus clutching me?

Anon my sense grows stronger, but my wild fancies still continue: I am yet uncertain if it be life!

What are those dark objects passing before my eyes! They are birds upon the wing—large birds of sable plumage. I know them. They are vultures. These are of the earth. Such could not exist in a region of spirits?

Ah! those sounds! they are weird enough to be deemed unearthly—wild enough to be mistaken for the voices of demons. From far beneath, they appear to rise, as if from the bowels of the earth, sinking and swelling in prolonged chorus.

I know and recognise the voices—they are human. I know the chanted measure—it is the death song of the Indian!

The sounds are suggestive. I am not dreaming—I am not dead. I am awake, and on the earth.

Memory comes to my aid. By little and little, I begin to realise my situation. I remember the siege—the smoke—the confused conflict—all that preceded it, but nothing after. I thought I had been killed. But no—I live—I am a captive.

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My comrades—are they alive? Not likely. Better for them, if they be not. The conciousness of life need be no comfort to me. In that wild chant there is breathing a spirit of vengeance.

Oh! that I had not survived to hear it! too surely do I know what will follow that dirge of death. It might as well be my own.

I am in pain. My position pains me—and the hot sun glaring upon my cheek. My arms and limbs smart under thongs, that bind too tightly. One crosses my throat that almost chokes me, and the stick between my teeth renders breathing difficult. There is a pain upon the crown of my head, and my skull feels as if scalded. O Heavens! have they *scalped* me?

With the thought, I endeavour to raise my hand. But, no—I cannot budge either hand or arm. Not a finger can be moved; and I am forced to remain in horrid doubt as to whether the hair be still upon my head—with more than a probability that it is gone!

But how am I confined? And where? I am fast bound to something—every joint in my body is fixed and immobile, as if turned to stone. I can feel thongs cutting sharply into my skin; and my back and shoulders press against some supporting substance, that seems hard as rock.

I cannot tell what it is. I cannot even see my own person—neither breast nor body—neither arms nor legs—not an inch of myself. The fastening over my face holds it upturned to the sky; and my head feels firmly set, as if the vertebral column of my neck had become ossified into a solid mass.

And where am I in this stringent attitude? I am conscious that I am a captive and bound—a captive to Indians—to Arapahoes. Memory helps me to this knowledge; and further more, that I should be, if I have not been carried elsewhere, in valley of the Huerfano—by the Orphan butte. Ha! why should I not be upon the butte—on its summit?

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I remember going down to the plain; and then being struck senseless to the earth. For all that, I may have been taken up again. The savages may have borne me back, to satisfy some whim? They often act in such strange fashion with their vanquished victims. I must be on some eminence—since I cannot see objects before me.

In all likelihood, I am on the top of the mound. This will account for my not having a view of the ground; it will also explain the direction in which the voices are reaching me. Those who utter them, are below, upon the plain?

The death-song ceases; and sounds of other import are borne upward to my ears; shouts that appear to be signals—words of command in the fierce guttural of the Arapaho. Other sounds seem nearer—the voices of two men in conversation. They are Indian voices.

As I listen, they grow more distinct. The speakers are approaching me—the voices appear as if rising out of the ground beneath my feet!

They draw nigher and nigher. They are close to where I stand—so close I can feel them breathing upon my body, but still I see them not. Their heads are below the line of my vision.

I feel a hand—its knuckles pressing against my throat; the cold blade of a knife is laid upon my cheek; its steel point glistens in my eyes. I shudder with a horrid thought.

I mistake the purpose. I hear the 'wheek' that anounces the cutting of a tight-drawn cord—the thong slackens and drops off my cheeks. My head is free; but the piece of wood between my teeth—that remains still gagging me firmly. I cannot get rid of it.

I now looked below, and around me. I perceive the correctness of my conjecture. I am on the butte—upon its summit. I am close to the edge of the platform, and command a full view of the valley below.

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A painted Arapaho is standing on each side of me. One is a common warrior, with nought to distinguish him from his fellows. The other is a chief. Even without the insignia of his rank, the tall gaunt form and lupine visage are easily identified. They are those of Red-Hand—the truculent chieftain of the Arapahoes.

Now, for the first time, do I perceive that I am naked. From the waist upward, there is not a rag upon me—arms, breast, and body all bare!

This does not surprise me. It is natural that the robbers should have stripped me, especially that they should have taken my coat, whose yellow buttons are bright gold in the eyes of an Indian; but I am soon to learn that for another purpose have they thus bereft me of my garments.

Now, also, do I perceive the *fashion* in which I am confined erect upon my feet, with arms stretched out to their full fathom My limbs are lashed to an upright post; and, with the same thongs, are my arms tied to a transverse beam. *I am bound upon a cross!*

CHAPTER LXI.

THE MYSTERIOUS CIRCLE.

In an exulting tone, the savage chief broke silence.

'*Bueno!*' cried he, as soon as he saw that my eyes were upon him—'*bueno, bueno!* The pale-face still lives! the heart of the Red-Hand is glad of it—ha, ha, ha! Give him to drink of the fire-water of Taos! Let him be strong! Fill him with life, that death may be all the more bitter to him.'

These orders were delivered to his follower, who in obedience to them, removed the gag; and, holding to my lips a calabash

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filled with Taos whisky, poured a quantity of its contents down my throat.

The beverage produced the effect which the savage chief appeared to desire. Scarcely had I swallowed the fiery spirit when my strength and senses were restored to their full vigour—but only to make me feel more keenly the situation in which I stood—to comprehend acutely the appalling prospect that was before me.

This was the design in resuscitating me. No other purpose had the cruel savage. Had I entertained any doubt as to the motive, his preliminary speech would have enlightened me; but it was made still clearer by that which followed.

'Dog of a pale-face!' cried he, brandising a long Spanish knife before my eyes; 'you shall see how the Red-Hand can revenge himself upon the enemies of his race. The Slayer of Panthers, and the White Eagle, shall die a thousand deaths. They have mocked the forest maiden, who has followed them from afar. Her vengeance shall be satisfied; and the Red-Hand will have his joy—ha, ha, ha!

Uttering a peal of demoniac laughter, the Indian held the point of the knife close to my face—as if about to drive the blade into my eyes. It was but a feint to produce terror—a spectacle which this monster was said to enjoy.

Wingrove was still alive: the wretch Su-wa-nee must be near?

'*Carajo!*' again yelled the savage. What promised you the Red-Hand? To cut the living flesh from your bones? But no—that would be merciful. The Arapahoes have contrived a sweeter vengeance—one that will appease the spirits of our slain warriors. We shall combine sport with the sacrifice of the pale-face dogs—ha, ha, ha!

After another fiendish cachinnation, far more horrible to hear than his words of menace, the monster continued:

'Dog! you refuse to instruct the Arapaho in the skill of the

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fire-weapon Wah! you shall furnish them a lesson before you die—ha, ha! You shall see!'

'Hoste!' he continued, addressing himself to his follower; 'prepare him for the sacrifice! Our warriors are impatient for the sport. The blood of our brothers is calling for vengeance. This in white, with a red spot in the centre—the rest of his body in black!'

These mysterious directions were accompanied by a corresponding gesture. With the point of his knife, the savage traced a circle upon my breast—just as if it had been on the bark of a tree. The scratch was light, though here and there it drew blood. At the words 'red spot in the centre,' as if to make the direction more emphatic, he punctured the spot with his knife, till the blood flowed freely. Had he driven the blade to its hilt, I could not have flinched: I was fixed firmly as the cross to which they had bound me.

I could not speak a word—either to question his intent, or reply to his menace. The gag was still between my teeth, and I was necessarily silent. It mattered little about that. Had my tongue been free, it would have been idle to use it. In the wolf's visage, there was not one trait of clemency: every feature bespoke the obduracy of unrelenting revenge. I knew that he would only have mocked any appeal I might have made. It was just as well that I had no opportunity of making it.

After giving some further directions to his follower—and once more repeating his savage menace, in the same exulting tone—he passed behind me; and I lost sight of him. I could tell by the noise that reached me at intervals that he had gone down from the rock; and was returning to his warriors upon the plain.

It was the first time since my face-fastenings had been cut loose, that I had a thought of looking in that direction. During all the while that the Red-Hand stood by me, I had been in constant dread of instant death—or of some equally fearful issue

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The gleaming blade had never been out of my eyes for two seconds at a time: for in the gesticulations that accompanied his speeches, the steel had played an important part; and I knew not the moment it might please the ferocious savage to put an end to my life.

Now that he was gone, and I found a respite from his torturing menace, my eyes turned mechanically to the plain. I there beheld a spectacle, that under other circumstances might have filled me with horror. Not so then. The agony of my thoughts was already too keen to be further quickened. Even the gory skull of one of my comrades, who lay scalped upon the sward scarcely added an emotion. It was a sight I had anticipated, They could not all be alive.

CHAPTER LXII.

A SAVAGE ARTIST.

The ensanguined skull was the first object that caught my eye. The dead man was easily identified. The body, short, plump, and rotund, could be no other than that of the unfortunate Irishman. His jacket had been stripped off; but some tattered remnants of sky-blue, still clinging to his legs, aided me in identifying him.

Poor fellow! The lure of Californian metal had proved an ill star for him. His golden dream was at an end. He was lying along the sward, upon his side, half doubled up. I could not see his face. His hands were over it, with palms spread out—as if shading his eyes from the sun. It was a position of ordinary repose; and one might have fancied him asleep. But the gory crown, and red mottling upon the shirt—seeming still wet—forbade the supposition. He slept, but it was the sleep of death.

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My eyes wandered in search of the others. There were fires burning. They were out upon the plain, some three hundred yards from the base of the butte. They had been lately kindled for their smoke was rising in thick volumes, part of it falling back to the earth. Around the fires, and through the smoke, flitted the forms of the Indians. They appeared to be cooking and feasting. Some of them staggering about the fires, kept up an incessant babble—at intervals varying their talk with a savage whoop. Others danced around, accompanying their leaps with the monotonous 'hi-hi-hi-ya.' All appeared to have partaken freely of the fire-water of Taos. A few more seriously disposed were grouped around four or five prostrate forms, that were evidently the bodies of their slain.

The two we had shot from their horses must have been among these; since they were no longer to be seeen where they had fallen. Those around the bodies stood hand in hand chanting the dismal death-song.

Not far from the fires, a group fixed my attention. It consisted of three figures, all in attitudes as different as it was possible to place them in. He who lay along the ground upon his back was the young hunter Wingrove. He still wore his fringed buckskin shirt and leggings; and by these I recognised him. He was at too great a distance for his features to be distinguished. He appeared to be bound hand and foot—with his ankles lashed together, and his wrists tied behind his back. He was thus lying upon his arms, in an irksome position; but the attitude showed that he was alive. I knew it already.

Some half-dozen paces from him was a second form, difficult to be recognised as that of a human body—though it was one. It was the body of Jephthah Bigelow. Its very oddness of shape enabled me to identify it—odder from the attitude in which I now beheld it. It lay flat along the grass, face downward, the long ape-like legs and arms stretched out to their full extent, both as

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to length and width; and radiating from the thin trunk like spokes from the nave of a wheel!

Viewing it from my elevated position, this attitude appeared all the more ludicrous; but it was easy to perceive that it was not voluntary. The numerous pegs standing up from the sward, and the cords attached to them, and leading to the arms and limbs, showed that the *spread-eagle* position was a constrained one.

That it was Sure-shot, I had no doubt. The long locks of clay-colored hair were playing about in the breeze; and some remnants of bottle-greens till clung around his legs. But without these, the spider-like frame was too characteristic to be mistaken.

I was glad to see those yellowish tufts. They told that the wearer still lived—as they also declared the fact of his being bound. A dead body would not have merited such particular treatment.

It was, perhaps, the third figure of this group that most claimed my attention.

I saw that it was not that of a warrior, though quite as tall as many upon the plain. But the contour of the form was different—as also the fashion of the garments that draped it. It was the figure of a woman!

Had I not been guided in my conjectures by a previous knowledge—by the allusions that had occurred in the speeches of Red-Hand—I should never have dreamed of identifying that form. Forewarned by these, the apparition was not unexpected. The woman was Su-wa-nee.

She was standing erect by the prostrate form of the young hunter—her head slightly bent, and her face turned towards him. An occasional motion of her arm showed that she was speaking to him. The gesture seemed to indicate a threat. Was it possible that in that dread hour she was reviling him?

I was at too great a distance, either to hear her words, or note the expression upon her face. Only by the dumb show of

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her gesticulations, could I tell that a scene was passing between them.

A glance around enabled me to note some other changes in the aspect to the plain. The horses of the Indians were all picketed upon the grass, and browsing peacefully—as if the clangour of strife had never sounded in their ears. I could see my own Arab a little apart, with the other horse and the mules—all in charge of a horse-guard, who stood sentry near them.

The wagon was still by the base of the mound; and the cedars along its sides were yet unburnt! I thought that the flames had consumed them, but no. The object of the fires had been to blind us with their smoke—so as to drive us from our position, and thus facilitate our capture.

I was not permitted to make these observations without interruption. The savage who had stood by me had a duty to perform; and during all this time, he was busied in its performance. A singular and inexplicable operation it appeared.

His first act was to blacken my body from the waist upward, including my face, throat, and arms. The substance used appeared to be a paste of charcoal, which he rubbed rudely into my skin. A circle upon my breast—that traced out by the blade of the chief—was left clear; but as soon as the black ground had been laid on, a new substance was exhibited, of snow-white colour, resembling chalk or gypsum. With this—after the blood had been carefully dried off—the circular space was thickly coated over, until a white disc about as large as a dining-plate showed conspicuously upon my breast! The red spot in the centre of this was necessary to complete the escutcheon; but the painter appeared at a loss for the colour, and paused to reflect.

Only a moment was he at fault. He was an ingenious artist; and his ingenuity soon furnished him with an idea.

Drawing his knife, and sticking the point of it some half inch deep into the fleshy part of my thigh, he obtained the required

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carmine; and, after dipping his finger in the blood, and giving it a dab in the centre of the white circle, he stood for a moment contemplating his work. A grim smile announced that he was satisfied with it; and uttering a final grunt, the swarthy savage leaped down from the platform, and disappeared from my sight.

A horrid suspicion had already taken possession of my soul. I was not left long to speculate upon the purpose for which I had been thus bedaubed; the suspicion soon gave place to certainty.

Upon the plain directly in front of me, and less than a hundred yards from the butte, the warriors were collecting in groups. The Red-Hand with his under-chiefs had already arrived there; and the other Indians were forsaking the fires, and hurrying up to the spot.

They had left their lances apart, standing up from the plain, with their shields, bows, and quivers leaning against them, or suspended from their shafts. The only weapons brought upon the ground were the guns. With these they were now occupying themselves—apparently preparing them for use.

I saw them trace a line upon the grass, by stretching a lazo between two upright pegs. I saw them wiping, loading, and priming their pieces—in short, going through all the preliminary manœuvres observed by marksmen preparing for a trial of skill.

Then burst on me in all its broad reality the dread horror for which I was reserved—then did I comprehend the design of that white circle with its centre of red: the savages were about to hold a shooting match—*my breast was to be their target!*

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CHAPTER LXIII.

A PITILESS PASTIME.

YES—to hold a shooting-match was undoubtedly the design of my captors; and equally clear was it that my breast was to be their mark. This explained my position upon the summit of the mound, as well as my attitude upon the cross. I was bound to the latter that I might be held erect, spread and conspicuous.

I could not comfort myself with any doubt as to their intention. Every movement I saw confirmed it; and the question was finally set at rest by Red-Hand possessing himself of one of the loaded muskets, and making ready to fire.

Stepping a pace or two in front of the line of his warriors, he raised the piece to his shoulder, and pointed it towards me.

It is vain to attempt describing the horror I endured at that moment. Utterly unable to move, I gazed upon the glistening barrel, with its dark tube, that threatened to send forth the messenger of death.

I have stood before the pistol of the duellist. It is not a pleasant position to be in, under any conditions of quarrel. Still is it perfect happiness compared with that I then held. In the former case, there are certain circumstances that favour the chances of safety. You know that you are *en profile* to your antagonist—thus lessening the danger of being hit. Judging by yourself, you feel assured that the aim taken will be quick and unsteady, and the shot a random one. You are conscious of possessing the capability of motion—that whether you may feel inclined to give way to it or not, you still have a certain discretior

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of avoiding the deadly missile—that by your own skill or quickness, you may hinder it from being sent.

There are other circumstances of a moral nature to sustain you in a trial of this kind—pride, angry passion, the fear of social contempt, and stronger than all—perhaps most frequent—the jealousy of rival love.

From none of all these could I derive support, as I stood before the levelled musket of the Arapaho. There was no advantage—either moral or physical—in my favour. I was broad front to the danger, without the slightest capacity of 'dodging' it; while there was nothing to excite the nerves of the marksman, or render his aim unsteady. On the contrary, he was sighting me as coolly as if about to fire at the trunk of a tree!

It may have been but a minute that the savage occupied himself in adjusting his aim; but to me it appeared ten. In such a situation, I may have believed the seconds to be minutes: they seemed so. In reality, the time must have been considerable. The beads of sweat that had started from my brow were chasing each other down my cheeks, and dropping upon my breast. So prolonged was my suspense, I might have fancied that the Arapaho was designedly dallying with his aim, for the purpose of sporting with my fears.

He may have had such motive for procrastination. I could believe it. Distant though he was, I could mark his fiendish smile, as he repeatedly dropped the piece from his shoulder, and then returned it to the level.

That he meant more than mere menace, however, was proved in the end. Having satisfied himself with several idle feints, I saw him make demonstration, as if setting himself more eagerly to the work. This time he was in earnest. His cheek lay steadily along the stock—his arms appeared more rigid—his finger was pressing on the trigger—the moment had come.

The flash from the pan—the red stream poured forth from the muzzle—the hist of the bullet, were all simultaneous. The re

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port came afterwards; but, before it had reached my ears, I knew that I was untouched. The lead had whizzed past, at a distance, as I could judge by the sound, of several feet from my body.

I heard a scratching behind me: and the instant after, a savage face came before my eyes. It was that of the artist, who had painted me for the part I was playing. I fancied he had gone down to the plain, but no. He had remained near me, concealing his body behind the rock. He was now enacting a different *rôle*—that of marker for the marksmen.

Running his eye over my body, and perceiving that I was nowhere hit, he telegraphed the intelligence to his comrades upon the plain; and then glided back to his covert.

I was relieved from that terrible anxiety, but only for a short moment—a mere interval of about a dozen seconds' duration. The Red-Hand, after firing, had resigned his place. This was instantly occupied by one of his sub-chiefs; who, armed with another musket, came up to the line in a similar manner.

Again saw I the gleaming barrel brought to the level, with its dark tube pointed upon my body.

This fellow was more expeditious; but for all that, it was a moment of racking torture. Again did the drops bead out upon my brow, and chase one another down my cheeks. Again had I to undergo all the agony of death itself—and, as before, without dying, or even losing a drop of blood!

As before, I beheld the puff of smoke, the flash, the blaze of fire projected from the muzzle; but ere the crack reached me, I heard the 'thud' of the bullet, as it flattened against the granite below my feet.

This time the marker did not mount up on the platform. He had seen the splinters shivered from the rock; and without further inquiry, he, for the second time, telegraphed a miss.

A third marksman soon appeared upon the stand; and my fears returned—as acute as ever. This fellow caused me to suffer nearly a dozen deaths. Either was his gun without a flint

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or his powder damp; for, after snapping it nearly a dozen times, the piece refused to go off. Had it been designed for a new horror, it could not have been better planned. Each time that the savage essayed to fire, I had to undergo the agony of a fresh pprehension.

It ended by another gun being placed in his hands, that *did* go off, but with no advantage to the clumsy marksman; for his shot, like that of the Red-Hand, whistled past, far wide of the mark.

A fourth now took the ground. This was a tall, swarthy warrior—one of the tallest of the tribe; and without the insignia of a chief. The cool and deliberate manner in which he went about his work, caused me to anticipate in him a better shot; and my apprehensions were heightened to a degree of painful intensity

I felt my whole frame shiver as his gun went off; and for a time I believed myself hit. The cheer of his companions upon the plain announced their belief in the success of the shot; but he upon the summit soon undeceived them—as I was myself reassured. The bullet had struck the wood-work of my crucifix—one of the cross-pieces to which my arms were bound. It was the shock of the timber that had deceived me into the belief that I had been hit.

A fifth marksman followed; and then another and another, until more than a dozen had tried their hands. The guns were all emptied; but this caused only a short cessation in the cruel sport. They were soon reloaded; and new candidates stepped forward to make trial of their skill.

I had by this time discovered that they were not practising for mere sport.

It was a *game*, and bets were upon it. Apart upon the plain, the stakes were laid—consisting of saddles, robes, weapons, and the plunder of the wagon. Horses also were picketed near—surplus animals—that were set against one another; whether in

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many separate wages, or all forming a grand 'pool,' I could not determine My own scalp—I was uncertain whether I still wore it—was no doubt the chief object of the contest. It was the 'cup,' to be given to him who should place his bullet in that white circle upon my breast, and nearest the red spot in the centre!

The guns once more reloaded, the firing recommenced. But one shot was allowed to each; and this only to those who had placed a stake. The condition gave me an opportunity of experiencing my apprehensions in different degrees; since, according to the apparent adroitness or clumsiness of the marksman, my fears of being hit were greater or less.

Strange to say, before a dozen shots had been fired, *I no longer wished them to miss!* The dread ordeal so oft repeated, was too terrible to be borne. I was sustained by no ultimate hope of escape. I knew that the fiends would continue firing till some one of them should finish me by a fatal shot; and I cared not how soon it should be sent. I desired it to come. Death was preferable to the agony I was enduring.

CHAPTER LXIV.

THE THOUSAND DEATHS.

For a full hour was the pitiless sport continued—during which at least fifty shots had been fired at me. The truculent chieftain had threatened me with a thousand deaths. He was fulfilling his threat to the letter; for notwithstanding the unskillful practice, I could not help, on the eve of each discharge, experiencing a certain creeping of the flesh, and curdling of the blood, as if that moment was to be my last. If I had not yet died a thousand times, for at least a hundred had I felt all the sen-

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cations that should precede actual death. Over a hundred times; for although but fifty shots had been fired, twice as often had the old guns snapped or flashed in the pan; and each of these was preceded by its especial pang.

I had not escaped altogether unscathed: I had been hit in two or three places—in my arms and limbs. Blood was running down my legs, and creeping over my feet. I could feel it warm and wet, as it trickled between my toes. In a little hollow of the rock, directly in front of me, a crimson pool was collecting.

The wounds could not be severe; since I scarcely felt them. Perhaps only the crease of the bullet? A scratch would be sufficient to cause the effusion of the blood, copious as it appeared to be. I felt certain that no bone had yet been broken—that no vital part of my body had been touched.

After about an hour had been spent by the savages in this dastardly practice, the firing became suddenly suspended. I could not tell why; and sought for an explanation by watching the movements of the marksmen.

Had they exhausted their ammunition? This was the idea that came uppermost.

The chiefs had turned face to face, and were again engaged in some earnest deliberation.

The subject of their talk was made known by their gesticulations. They were pointing towards Sure-shot, who still lay, as I have described, flat upon his face. Wingrove was no longer there; nor yet Su-wa-nee! Where could they have gone? I had seen both but the moment before! Had she unbound, and rescued him? Was it about them that the savages were in consultation?

The result proved not. It was the deserter who was the object of their attention. Half a dozen Indians were seen separating from the group. They ran up to the spot where Sure-shot lay. Stooping around him, they undid his fastenings; and then raising him to his feet, commenced dragging him towards the crowd.

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The terrified man made no resistance. It would have been idle. There was a brawny savage on each side, grasping him by the wrist; and three or four behind pushing him forward at a run. His long hair streaming loosely, strengthened the expression of despair that was depicted upon his countenance. No doubt he deemed it his last hour. Whither could they be dragging him? whither but to death?

This was my own belief—at first; but in a few minutes I had reason to change it. For a short while, Sure-shot was encircled by the dusky forms, and I saw him not—or only the crown of his head—conspicuous by its yellow hue among the darker *chevelures* of those who surrounded him. What they were doing to him, I could not guess; but they appeared to be offering no further violence.

After a time, the group scattered from around him, and the ex-rifleman was again uncovered.

With some surprise, I perceived that the expression of his countenance had undergone a total change. It was no longer that of terror—much less of despair. On the contrary, there was a certain air of confidence visible both in his face and manner—as if something had been said, or done to him, that had given him satisfaction.

I was further surprised at perceiving that he had a gun in his hand—his own rifle—and that he was in the act of charging the piece!

My surprise changed to indignation as I saw him step forward to the line, and stand facing me—evidently with the intention to fire!

'Cowardly traitor, he has accepted life upon some base condition. Jeph Bigelow! Sure-shot! whom I thought true as steel! I would not have believed it.'

Such was the reflection, to which my gag prevented me from giving utterance.

In reality I felt astonished at the behaviour of the old ranger.

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I believed him a better man; but the dread of death is a powerful test to apply to the human soul; and hard must be the conditions of life when they are refused. Sure-shot had succumbed to the temptation.

Such was my belief, as I saw him raise his piece, and stand confronting me—in an attitude that too plainly bespoke his intention.

Another surprise awaited me—another stimulus to my indignation. Instead of looking ashamed of his work, and cowering under my glance, he appeared eager and determined There was even an expression of fierceness, ill becoming his countenance habitually meek. Under other circumstances, it would have been ludicrous enough. 'Bravado,' thought I, assumed, no doubt, to give satisfaction to his new allies.

I had not recovered from the confusion of my surprise, when his voice fell upon my ear, uttered in a tone of anger, and accompanied with corresponding gestures. But the words that reached me explained all. On hearing them, I no longer suspected the loyalty of my old comrade. The angry expression was assumed. The counterfeit had a design, far different from that which I had attributed to it. It was Sure-shot himself—still crafty as true.

'Capting!' cried he, speaking quickly, and raising his gun with a gesture of menace, 'pay 'tention to whet I air abeout to say. Look savargerous at me, an' make these yeer verming 'lieve you an' me's que'lling. Fo'most tell me, ef they've kripled ye abeout the legs? I know ye can't speak; but shet yeer eyes, an' thet says "No."'

I was for the moment puzzled, by the matter as well as manner of the speech, which in no way corresponded. In an instant, however, I perceived that he had some design, and I hastened to obey his hurried instructions.

As to the first, I needed to make no alteration in my demeanour Under the belief that he was disloyal, I had been

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regarding him with a glance sufficiently scrowling. I preserved the expression—at the same time closing my eyes, as a negative answer to his query. Although wounded about the legs, I felt sure that I was not 'crippled.'

'So fur good!' continued he, still speaking loudly and angrily. 'Neow! slew yeer right elbow down a leetle, an' gi' me a better chance at thet eer strip o' hide. I kinder guess as heow I kin cut the thing. It 'peers to be all o' one piece, an' 'il peel off yeer body like a band o' rushes. Ef I cut it, theer 'll be a chance for ye. Theer's only one of the verming ahint the mound. Yeer hoss air theer; make for the anymal—mount 'im, an' put off like a streak of greased lightnin'! Neow!'

As he finished speaking, he stepped nearer to the line, and placed himself in an attitude to fire at me.

I had now comprehended his design. I saw, as he said, that the cord which bound me to the crucifix was all of one piece—a thin thong of raw hide—lapped tightly around my arms, legs, and body. If cut through at any point, it could easily be detached; and, true enough, my horse must be behind the butte, for I could not see him. By a quick run, I might succeed in reaching him, before the Indians could intercept me! If so, then indeed might there be an opportunity of escaping.

CHAPTER LXV.

A SHARP SHOT.

SLIGHT as appeared the chance of my being freed from my fastenings, by the method proposed, I was not without some faith in Sure-shot being able to cut the thong. His skill in the use of the rifle was notorious among good marksmen, and his aim believed to be unerring. I had known him to bring down with

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his bullet a small bird upon the wing; and had heard him declare that it was not by the *eye* but by the *hand* that he did it. In other words: he meant that his skill was not mechanical, but that he was guided in the act by some mental operation—which he himself but imperfectly understood. I could believe this the more readily—since Sure-shot was not the only marksman I had known possessed of this peculiar power. A something inexplicable, which may be classed with the mysterious phenomena of clairvoyance and 'horse-whispering.'

With such belief in his skill, I was not without faith that he might succeed in his design; and, to give him the chance he desired, I made a violent effort, and wrenched my arm downward. It was to all appearance a demonstration of my wrath, at what the pseudo-renegade had been saying to me; and it seemed to be thus interpreted by most of the savages who stood around him. The words of Sure-shot, spoken in English, were of course unintelligible to them, but notwithstanding the inappropriate gestures which he had used, the suspicions of one were aroused. This was the Red-Hand himself.

'What says he of the yellow scalp-lock to our captive?' inquired the chief in Spanish. 'Let him take heed, or he too shall become a shooting-mark for the Arapaho warriors!'

Sure-shot's reply was characteristic. It was also in broken Spanish, which the ranger had picked up during our campaign on the Rio Grande. Translated it ran thus:

'I'm only telling him how I'm about to get square with him, *Carrambo!* great chief! when I was a soldier in the army, yon fellow was my *capitano*, and gave me a flogging. Believe me, I'm right glad of this opportunity to have revenge on him. That's what I was telling him.'

'Ugh!' grunted the savage, apparently satisfied with the explanation.

'Neow, capting!' angrily shouted the rifleman, once more raising his piece to the level, 'look 'e out! Don't be skeer'd

abeout my hittin' o' ye! The whang lies well ageen the board The ball's a big 'un. I recking I kin bark it anyheow. Heer's to try!'

A tall yellow-haired man standing with a rifle to his shoulder—his sallow cheek resting against the stock—the barrel apparently aligned upon my body—the flash of a percussion cap—a stream of red fire and smoke from the muzzle—a shock, followed by the quivering of the timbers to which I was tied, were perceptions and sensations of almost simultaneous occurrence

Twisting my head, and turning my eyes almost out of their sockets, I was able to note the effect of the shot. The thong had been hit, just at the point where it doubled over the edge of the wood. It was cut more than half through!

By raising my elbow to its original position, and using it as a lever, I could tear apart the crushed fibres. I saw this; but in anticipation of a visit from the marker, I prudently forbore.

Soon after the grinning savage came gliding in front of me He perceived the track of the bullet, and pointed it out to those upon the plain. I was in a feverish suspense lest he might suspect design; but was relieved on seeing him step aside, and the shuffling grating noise from behind admonished me, that he was once more letting himself down from the platform.

The crowd had closed around Sure-shot, who appeared to be expostulating or explaining. I did not wait to witness the *dénouement*. Raising my elbow, and giving a quick jerk, I heard the thong snapping asunder; and saw the broken ends spring out from their folds.

Another wrench set my right arm free; and then, clutching the loosened coils, I unwound them with as much rapidity, as if I had been freeing myself from the embrace of a serpent!

Not one of the Indians saw what I was about, till after I had undone my fastenings. Their eyes had been turned upon Sure-shot—with whom they appeared to be engaged in some angry altercation It was only after I had sprung to one side, and

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stood clear of the crucifix, that I heard their ejaculations of astonishment, followed by their wild continuous screaming.

I stayed not to see what they were doing. I merely glanced towards them, as I turned away. They appeared fixed to their places, as if petrified by surprise!

The moments were precious; and, bounding across the platform, I leaped down upon the opposite side.

There was a little shelf about six feet below the summit. It was occupied by the savage artist. He had been seated upon the edge, with his legs hanging over. His back was towards me; and he was only apprised of what had transpired, by seeing me as I sprang down behind him. He had already heard the yells from the other side; and was just rising to take footing upon the ledge at the moment I dropped down.

He was too late for the accomplishment of his purpose. I saw that he was unarmed; but feared that by flinging himself upon me, he might hold or delay me.

I hesitated not as to what I should do. Rushing forward, I planted my foot against his shoulder, and giving his body a violent impulsion, shot it clear over the edge. I saw it bounding over the angular prisms, and rolling from block to block—till it sunk out of sight amidst the tortuous branches of the cedars.

I ran down the sloping path—taking many yards at a step. Near the bottom, was my horse—with that of Wingrove, and the mules. They formed a little group—but no longer under charge of a guard. The latter had just left them, and was running forward to intercept me. He had a weapon in his hands: it was a gun. He was pointing it upon me as he ran—as if seeking to cover me and fire.

I heeded not the threatening weapon, but rushed straight towards him. I could not go round, for he was between me and the horses. We both ran, as if to meet one another.

When less than five paces separated us, the Indian stopped sighted me, and pulled trigger. The gun snapped!

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Before he could lower the piece, I had clutched the barrel; and, with a desperate effort, wrenched the weapon from his grasp. I made a feint to strike him over the head; he threw up his arms to ward off the blow; but, instead of using the gun as a club, I punched him with the butt right under the ribs; and stretched him gasping upon the grass. He fell, as if shot through the head!

Still holding on to the gun—which, by a strange accident, proved to be my own rifle—I ran up to my horse. The creature welcomed me with a neigh of joy.

It was but the work of a moment to draw the picket-pin, gather up the lariat, and spring to his back. Once there, I felt that I was free!

The Indians came yelling around the butte—most of them afoot, and with no other weapons than the empty muskets. A few, more prudent than their fellows, had rushed towards their arms and horses; but, both being at a distance, they had not yet reached them; and the advantage was mine.

I was no longer hurried in my actions—not even afraid. I had no apprehension of being retaken. On the back of my brave steed, I felt like an ocean cast-away, who has climbed up the sides of a strong ship, and once more stands safely upon deck. From my pursuers, I could gallop away at will; and, after taking time to adjust my lariat as a halter, I gave the head to my horse, and rode off.

My Arab needed no urging. Up the valley went he, like a bird upon the wing. I could laugh to scorn the savage pack that came yelling behind me.

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CHAPTER LXVI

THE CHASE AND THE SYNCOPE.

I MADE direct for the cañon whence issued the stream. Its gap grew wider as I approached it, still appearing only a dark cleft between the rocks, as if the entrance to some subterranean passage.

I looked forward to it with satisfaction. Its shadowy chasm promised shelter and concealment.

When near the entrance of the gorge, I passed the ground where the wagon had been captured. Part of its load—barrels and heavy boxes—were lying upon the sward. They were all broken, and rifled of their contents. The plunder had been carried to the butte. The dead bodies were still there—only those of white men. I even halted to examine them. They were all stripped of their clothing—all scalped, and otherwise mutilated. The faces of all were blood bedaubed. Under the red mask, I could not have recognised them—even had they been the faces of old friends! There were six of them. Stripped of their clothing, I could form no conjectures as to who or what they had been—whether teamsters or emigrants, gold-seekers or soldiers. The Mormon could not have been among them; the bodies were all too stout for his; while, on the other hand, there was none of them that could have been mistaken for that of the squatter.

I turned away from the sickening sight, and continued my gallop. My pursuers were a full mile behind me. The sun had sunk over the crests of the cliffs, and I could just see the mounted

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savages through the darkling gloom—still following as fast as they were able.

In five minutes after, I had entered the gorge. The twilight continued no longer: in the cañon it was night.

I followed the stream upwards, keeping along near its bank. Thick darkness was over and around me; but the gleam of the water and its rippling sound served to guide me on the path. I could not see any track—either of horses or wagons—but I knew they must have passed over the ground. There was a narrow strip of bottom-land thickly timbered; and an opening through the trees indicated the road that the wagons had taken.

I trusted the trail to my horse. In addition to his keen instincts, he had been trained to tracking; and, with his head projected forward and downward—so that his muzzle almost touched the earth—he lifted the scent like a hound.

We could only make progress at a quick walk; but I consoled myself with the thought that my pursuers could go no faster.

Seeing how easily I had ridden away from them, they might abandon the pursuit, returning to revenge themselves upon my fellow-captives.

About these, my mind was filled with bitter anguish; and strange enough, my strongest sympathies were with Sure-shot! I could not help thinking that he had sacrificed himself to save me. There could be no doubt of his having done so. He had been offered life on some traitorous conditions, and could have lived. The Indian whom I had hurled over the rocks, if still alive, would explain my escape. The cunning savages would easily understand it. My brave comrade would take my place upon the crucifix!

For Wingrove, I had less fear. Surely love—even slighted love—would save him from the sacrifice? Yet, after what had occurred, I had but little reason to hope for him either.

I could think of but one chance of rescuing them: to over

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take the train, and prevail upon the escort to return. I even wondered at the dragoons having abandoned the wagon, and left the poor fellows who were with it to their fate! I could only explain such conduct, by supposing that these had been far behind, and that their disaster was still unknown to the people of the caravan. The six men who had fallen might have been the only ones along with the wagon; and their firing, as they defended themselves, might not have been heard? The roar of the water in the cañon might have drowned the reports of their guns; and as I now listened to its deafening sounds, I could believe in the hypothesis.

Indulging in such conjectures, I had groped my way some two or three miles up the gorge, when I became sensible of a singular faintness stealing over me. A chill crept through my frame—not like that produced by cold from without; but as if the blood was freezing in my veins! The feeling was accompanied by a sense of torpor and lassitude—like that experienced by one falling to sleep in a snow-storm.

I made an effort to rouse myself—thinking it was sleep that was oppressing me. It might well have been—since it was more than thirty hours since I had slept, and then only for a short while.

It occurred to me, that by dismounting and walking for a distance, I might recover warmth and wakefulness; and with this design, I alighted from my horse.

Once upon the ground, I discovered that I could not keep my feet! My limbs tottered under me, and felt weak as if I had been for months a bedril; and only by holding on to the withers of my horse, could I stand erect!

What could it mean? My steed turned his face towards me as if making the same inquiry.

I endeavored to remount him, but could not. I was unable even to clamber upon his back; and after an unsuccessful effort, I desisted—still supporting myself against his body. Had he moved away, I should have fallen.

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And I must have fallen, after my senses left me. In the last gleam of consciousness, I remembered standing by the side of my horse; but I must have fallen, for when thought returned, I found myself stretched at full length along the grass!

CHAPTER LXVII.

PASSED BY MY PURSUERS.

I MUST have fallen upon my back, or else turned upon it after falling. On opening my eyes, the sky was the first thing that met them. I saw only a strip of it, of dark-blue colour, bordered on each side by black. I knew it was the sky by its twinkling stars; and that the black borderings were the cliffs of the cañon. By this I remembered where I was, and the stars and darkness told me it was still night.

There was hot air upon my face, as if some one was behind breathing upon me. I raised my head a little, and looked upward. A pair of brilliant eyes were glancing above. So confused were my senses, that it was some time before I made them out to be the eyes of my Arab. He was standing over me, with his muzzle close to my forehead. It was his breathing I felt upon my face.

I could not tell how long I had been entranced. I had no clue to the time of night, and I was not in a condition to consult the stars. I must have lain several hours, partly in syncope, and partly asleep. It was fortunate I had a buffalo robe around my body. I had found it lying upon the plain among the dead men; and had snatched it up, and tied it around my shoulders as I rode on. But for it, I might have perished in my slumber, since the night was chill; and I had neither covering on my back nor blood in my veins to resist the cold. It was the

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absence of the latter that had brought me to the ground. I had left most of my blood upon the rock.

Sleep or time had revived me. I was able to get to my feet; and I arose. I was still weak, and staggered like a lamb; but my senses were sufficiently clear; and I remembered everything that had transpired. I was conscious of the danger of remaining in that place; and it was this thought that induced me to rise up, with the intention of going on.

I was strong enough to mount, and just strong enough to keep the seat upon my horse; but I was aware of the necessity of putting a wider distance between myself and the Red-Hand before daylight should arrive; and I commenced moving onward.

The trace was easily followed—more so than when I first entered the cañon. There was more light; and this must have been caused by a moon. I could see none—the cliffs hindered me—but the strip of sky above had the sheen of moonlight..

I rode but slowly. Feeble though I was, I could have ridden faster, but I was proceeding with caution. Strange as it may seem, I was now paying more regard to the front than the rear. I had a suspicion that my pursuers might be *ahead* of me.

I could hardly believe in their having abandoned the pursuit, after so slight an effort. Too many of them had fallen by my hand, for them to let me escape so easily, and with my scalp too. I had ascertained that the trophy was still upon my head.

It was quite possible they had passed me. While endeavouring to mount my horse, I had drawn him from the path; and the place where I had found myself lying was behind some bushes, screened from the eyes of any one riding along the track. In daylight, I might have been seen; but not then—the darkness would conceal me.

And it *had* concealed me, as I soon after learned. My suspicion proved the means of saving me. But for the caution it had caused, I should have ridden head to head against the horses of the Indians.

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I had proceeded about a mile further, and was creeping quietly forward, when my steed raised his head horizontally, and gave utterance to a low snort. At the same instant, he stopped without any tightening of the rein!

Above the sough of the stream, I heard noises. The intonation of the red man's voice was easily recognised. There were Indians in front of me!

Were they coming or going? The voices grew louder as I listened—the speakers were nearing me.

My first thought was to glide behind the trees. A glance showed that these were not tall enough: they were mere bushes They might have concealed the body of a man; but a horse standing up could not have been hidden behind them.

For a moment I was puzzled how to act. I thought of turning, and riding back to where I had lain.

I was in the act of facing round, when through the sombre light I observed a break in the cliff. It appeared to be a gap, the entrance of a lateral ravine, and offered a chance of concealment: since it was even darker than the cañon itself.

I hesitated not about accepting the shelter it promised; and heading my horse to it, I rode rapidly but silently forward.

When fairly concealed by its shadowy gloom, I again halted and listened.

I heard the hoof-strokes of horses and the voices of men. It was the deep guttural of the Arapaho. A troop rode past, going back towards the valley. They were those who had pursued me.

Were these *all* of my pursuers? There appeared to be only a small party—ten or a dozen horsemen. Others might have gone up the river, and had not yet returned?

It was this doubt that caused me to hesitate: otherwise I should at once have ridden back into the cañon, and kept on up the stream. By doing so, I might get between two parties of my pursuers, with no chance of retreating.

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Perhaps pickets were placed along the path? To fall upon one of these would be fatal.

Why not follow the lateral ravine? Was it only a *cul de sac*? If not, I might ride up it for a distance, and cross to the caravan trace, above any point to which the pursuit might have been carried?

This plan appeared the safest, and I adopted it.

I rode on up the gorge, which very much resembled that I had left—only that there was no water in it. It had not been always so: for my path here and there ran over a channel of rocks, which indicated the bed of a stream, now dry.

I followed it about two miles. I would have then turned in the proper direction, but could not. The cliffs continued on both sides; I could not scale them.

I had no choice but go on up the ravine; but that would be at right angles to my proper course?

There was no alternative but to halt and wait for daylight. Indeed, I was too faint to ride further. Slight exertion fatigued me; and, no longer in dread of immediate danger, I deemed it more prudent to stop, and, if possible, gain strength by rest.

I dismounted, gave my horse to the grass; and, having wrapped myself in the warm robe, soon entered upon the enjoyment of sleep—sweeter and more natural than the involuntary slumber in which I had been lately indulging.

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CHAPTER LXVIII.

THE TRACK OF THE MOCCASIN.

The blue dawn of morning was glinting among the rocks when I awoke. On the crest of the cliff was a streak of amber coloured light, that betokened the rising of the sun. It was time to be stirring.

I had no toilet to make—no breakfast to eat: nothing to do but mount, and move onward.

I continued up the lateral ravine—since there was no path leading out of it; and to return to the Huerfano, would have been to ride back into the teeth of the danger.

I still felt faint. Though less than twenty-four hours since I had eaten, I hungered acutely. Was there nothing I could eat?

I looked inquiringly around. It was a scene of sterility and starvation. Not a symptom of life—scarcely a sign of vegetation! Rocks bare and forbidding, formed two parallel façades, grinning at each other across the gorge—their rugged features but little relieved by the mottling of dark juniper's that clung from their clefts. There appeared neither root nor fruit that could be eaten. Only a chameleon could maintain existence in such a spot?

I had scarcely made this reflection, when, as if to contradict it, the form of a noble animal became outlined before my eyes. Its colour, size, and proportions were those of a stag of the red deer species; but its spiral horns proclaimed it of a different kind. These enabled me to identify it as the rare mountain ram—the giant *ammon* of the Northern Andes.

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It stood upon a salient point of the cliff, its form boldly projected against the purple sky, in an attitude fixed and statuesque. One might have fancied it placed there for embellishment. A characteristic feature of that wild landscape, the scene would have been incomplete without it.

From my point of observation, it was five hundred yards distant. It would have been equally safe at five; since I had no means of destroying it. I might easily have got within shot range—since a belt of cotton-woods just commencing where I had halted, extended up the bottom of the cañon. Under these, I could have stalked to the base of the cliff on which the animal stood—a sort of angular promontory projecting into the gorge. This advantage only rendered the sight more tantalising: my gun was empty, and I had no means of reloading it.

Was it certain the piece was empty? Why should the Indian have believed it to be loaded? Up to this moment, I had not thought of examining.

I drew the ramrod, and inverted it into the barrel. The head fell upon a soft substance. The screw stood four fingers above the muzzle: the gun was charged!

There was no cap upon the nipple. There had been none. This accounted for the snapping of the piece. In all likelihood, I owed my life to the circumstance of the savages being ignorant of the percussion principle.

I was now indebted to another circumstance for a supply of caps. The locker near the heel of the stock had escaped the attention of the Indians. Its brass cover had passed for a thing of ornament. On springing it open, the little caps of corrugated copper gleamed before my eyes—an abundance of them.

I tapped the powder into the nipple, adjusted a cap, and, dismounting, set forth upon the stalk.

The spreading tops of the cotton-woods concealed me; and, crouching under them, I made my approaches as rapidly as the nature of the ground would permit.

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It grew damper as I advanced; and, presently, I passed pools of water and patches of smooth mud—where water had recently lain. It was the bed of an intermittent stream—a hydrographic phenomenon of frequent occurrence in the central regions of North America. The presence of water accounted for that of the cotton-wood trees—a sure indication of moisture in the soil.

The water was a welcome sight. I was suffering from thirst, even more than from hunger; and, notwithstanding the risk of losing my chance of a shot, I must stop and drink.

I was creeping forward to the edge of one of the ponds, when a sight came under my eyes that surprised me to such a degree as to drive both thirst and hunger out of my thoughts—at least for the moment.

In the margin of sandy mud extending along the edge of the water, appeared a line of imprints—the tracks of human feet.

On crawling nearer, I perceived that they were moccasin-tracks, but of such tiny dimensions as to leave no doubt as to the sex of the individual who had made them. Clearly, they were the impressions of a woman's feet

A woman must have passed that way—an Indian woman of course?

This was my first reflection; and almost simultaneous with it arose another interrogative conjecture: was it Su-wa-nee?

No. The foot was too small for that of the forest-maiden. I had a remembrance of the dimensions of hers.

The tracks before my eyes were not over eight inches in length; and could only have been made by a foot slender, and of elegant shape. The imprint was perfect; and its clear outline denoted the light elastic tread of youth. It was a *young* woman who had left those footmarks behind her.

At first, I saw no reason to doubt that the tracks were those of some Indian girl. Their size would not have hindered the supposition. Among the aboriginal belles of America, a little foot is the rule—a large one the exception. I had tracked many

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a pair much smaller than those; but never had I seen the footprints of an Indian with the *toes turned out:* and such was the peculiarity of those now before me.

This observation—which I did not make till after some time had elapsed—filled me with astonishment and something more. It was suggestive of many and varied emotions. The girl or woman who had made these tracks could never have been strapped to an Indian cradle. She was white!

CHAPTER LXIX.

A RIVAL STALKER.

It was not by a conjecture that I arrived at this conclusion. I was certain that the footsteps were not those of a squaw—all inexplicable as was the contrary hypothesis.

I observed that they were quite recent—of less than an hour's age; and, as I rose from regarding them, a new sign appeared on the same bed of sand—the footmarks of a wolf!

No—I was deceived by resemblance—on nearer examination, they were not wolf-tracks, but those of a dog, and evidently a large one. These were also fresh like the others—made doubtless at the same time.

The dog had accompanied the woman, or rather had been following her; a little further on, where both were in the same line, his track was uppermost.

There were two special reasons why this sign should astonish me—a *white* woman in such a place, and *wearing moccasins!* But for the style of the *chaussure*, I might have fancied that the tracks were those of some one who had strayed from the caravan. I might have connected them with *her*—ever upper

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most in my thoughts. But—no. Small though they were, they were yet too large for those *mignon* feet, well remembered.

After all, I *might* be mistaken? Some dusky maiden might have passed that way, followed by her dog?

This hypothesis would have removed all mystery, had I yielded to it. I could not: it was contrary to my tracking experience. Even the dog was not Indian: his paws proclaimed him of a different race.

My perplexity did not hinder me from quenching my thirst. The pain was paramount; and after assuaging it, I turned my eyes once more towards the cliff. The ram had not stirred from his place. The noble animal was still standing upon the summit of the rock. He had not even changed his attitude. In all likelihood, he was acting as the sentinel of a flock, that was browsing behind the crest of a cliff.

The sun was falling fair upon his body, and deepened the fern colour upon his flanks. I could see his full round eyes glistening under the golden beam.

I was near enough to bring him down; and should the rifle prove to have been properly loaded, I was likely to have for my breakfast the choicest viand of the mountain regions of America.

I had raised my piece; sighted the noble game; and was about to pull trigger, when, to my astonishment, the animal sprang off from the cliff; and, turning back downward, fell heavily into the gorge!

When I saw him pitching outward from the rock, I fancied he was making one of those singular somersaults, frequently practised by the *Ovis ammon* in descending the ledges of a cliff. But no: he would have come down upon his huge elastic horns, instead of falling as he had done, with the dull sodden sound of a lifeless body.

I perceived that the bighorn had dropped dead; and the report of a gun—that rang through the gorge, and was still rever

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berating from the cliffs—told the cause of its death. Some hunter, stalking on the other side, had taken the start of me!

White or red? Which fired the shot? If an Indian, my head would be in as much danger of losing its skin as the sheep. If a white man, I might still hope for a breakfast of broiled mutton. Even a churl might be expected to share with a starving man; but it was not the quarter in which to encounter a Christian of this kidney.

It was the crack of a rifle. The red man rarely hunts with a rifle. The arrow is his favourite weapon for game.

Notwithstanding the remoteness from civilisation, the probabilities were that the hunter was white. He might be one of those attached to the caravan, or, more likely, a *free* trapper. I knew that upon several head tributaries of the Arkansas there were settlements of these singular men.

From prudential considerations I kept my place. Screened by the cotton-woods, I should have an opportunity of deciding the point, without my presence being suspected. If the hunter should prove to be an Indian, I could still retreat to my horse without being observed.

I had not long to wait. I heard a noise, as of some one making way through the bushes. The moment after, a huge, wolf-like animal rushed round the projecting angle of the cliff, and sprang upon the carcass of the bighorn.

At the same instant a voice reached my ears—"Off there, Wolf! off, villain dog! Don't you see that the creature is killed?—no thanks to you, sirrah?"

Good heavens! it was the voice of a woman!

While I was yet quivering under the surprise produced by the silvery tones, the speaker appeared before my eyes—a girl majestically beautiful!

A face fair-skinned with a tinge of golden brown, cheeks of purplish red—a nose slightly aquiline, with nostrils of spiral curve—eyes like those of the Egyptian antelope—a forehead

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white and high, above bounded by a band of shining black hair, and surmounted by a coronet of scarlet plumes—such was the head that I saw rising above the green frondage of the cotton-woods.

The body was yet hidden behind the leaves; but the girl just then stepped forward, and it too was exhibited—equally striking and picturesque.

I need not say it that was of perfect shape—bust, body and limbs all symmetrical. A face like that described could not belong to an ungainly form. When nature designs beauty, it is rare that she does her work by halves. Unlike the artists of the anatomic school, she makes the model for herself. Hence the perfect correspondence of its parts.

And perhaps fairer form had nature never conceived. The dullest sculptor might have been inspired by its contemplation.

The costume of the girl corresponded to the cast of her features. About these there was that air of wild picturesqueness, which we observe in art painting of the gipsy and sometimes in the gipsy herself—for those sirens of the green lanes have not all disappeared, and, but that I saw the snowy cone of Pike's Peak rising over the crest of the cliff, I might have fancied myself in the Sierra Estramadura, with a beautiful *gitana* before my eyes.

The soft fawn-skinned *tilma*, with its gaudy broidering of beads and stained quills—the fringed skirt and buskined ankles—the striped Navajo blanket slung scarf-like over the shoulders—all presented a true gipsy appearance. The plumed circlet upon the head was more typical of Transatlantic costume: and the rifle carried in a female hand was still another idiosyncrasy of America. It was from that rifle the report had come. It was not a *hunter* who had killed the game, but she who stood before me—a huntress—the WILD HUNTRESS.

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CHAPTER LXX.

THE WILD HUNTRESS.

No longer was it from fear that I held back; but a hesitancy springing from surprise and admiration. The sight of so much beauty—grand as unexpected—was enough to unnerve one, especially in such a place—and one to whose eye the female form had so long been a stranger. Su-wa-nee's I had seen only at a distance; and hers, to my sight, was no longer beautiful.

I hesitated to show myself, lest the sight of me should alarm this lovely apparition, and cause her to take flight. The thought was not unnatural—since the tri-coloured pigments of black, red and white were still upon my skin, and I must have presented the picture of a chimney-sweep with a dining-plate fixed upon his breast.

I knew that I must cut a ludicrous figure, and would have slipped back to the pool, and washed myself; but I dreaded to take my eyes from off that beautiful vision, lest I might never look upon it again! In my absence, she would be gone; I feared even then, that on seeing me she might take flight; and I was too faint to follow her. For this reason, I stood silently gazing through my leafy covert, like one who watches the movements of some shy and beautiful bird. I almost dreaded to breathe lest the sound might alarm her. I was planning at the same time how I should initiate an interview.

Her voice again reached me, as she recommenced scolding the dog; even its chiding tones were sweet. She had ap

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proached, and stooped for a moment over the bighorn, as if to satisfy herself that the animal was dead. Her canine companion did not appear to be quite sure of the fact; for he continued to spring repeatedly upon the carcass with open mouth, as if eager to devour it.

'Off, I say! off!' cried she, threatening the dog with the butt of her rifle. 'You wicked Wolf! what has got into you? Have I not told you that the thing is dead? What more do you want! Mind, sirrah!' continued she, shaking her finger significantly at the dog—'mind, my good fellow, *you* had no hand in the killing of it; and if you spoil the skin, you shall have no share in the flesh—you hear me? Not a morsel!'

Wolf appeared to understand the hint, and retired. Impelled by hunger, I accepted the cue.

'You will not refuse a morsel to one who is starving?'

'Aha! who speaks?' cried the huntress, turning round with a glance more of inquiry than alarm. 'Down, Wolf!' commanded she, as the dog bounded forward with a growl. 'Down you savage brute! Don't you hear that some one is starving? Ha! a negro! Poor devil! Where can he have come from, I wonder?'

Only my head was visible—a thick bush in front of me concealing my body. The char upon my face was deceiving her.

'No, not a negro,' said I, stepping out and discovering my person—'not a negro, though I have been submitted to the treatment of one.,

'Ho! white, red and black! Mercy on me, what a frightfu harlequin! Ha, ha, ha!'

'My toilette appears to amuse you, fair huntress? I might apologise for it—since I can assure you that it is not my own conception, nor is it to my taste any more than'——

'You are a white man, then?' said she, interrupting and drawing nearer to examine me.

'I was yesterday,' I replied turning half round to give her a

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sight of my shoulders, which the Indian artist had left untouched. 'To-day, I am as you see.'

'O heavens!' she exclaimed, suddenly changing her manner, 'this red? It is blood! You are wounded, sir! Where is your wound?'

'In several places am I wounded; but not dangerously; they are only scratches; I have examined them.'

'Who gave you these wounds?'

'Indians. I have just escaped from them.'

'Indians! What Indians?'

'Arapahoes.'

'Arapahoes? Where did you encounter them?'

The question was put in a hurried manner, and in a tone that betrayed excitement.

'On the Huerfano,' I replied—'by the butte. It was the band of a chief known as the Red-Hand.'

'Ha! the Red-Hand on the Huerfano! Stranger! are you sure of this?'

The earnest voice in which the interrogatory was put somewhat surprised me.

I answered by giving a brief and rapid detail of our capture, and subsequent treatment—without mentioning the names of my travelling companions, or stating the object of our expedition. Indeed, I was not allowed time to enter into particulars. I was hurried on by interpellations from my listener—who, before I could finish the narrative of my escape, interrupted me, exclaiming in an excited manner:

'Red-Hand in the valley of the Huerfano! news for Wa-ka-ra!'

After a pause she hastily inquired: 'How many warriors has the Red-Hand with him?'

'Nearly two hundred.'

'Not more than two hundred?'

'No—rather less I should say.'

'It is well—— You say you have a horse?'

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'My horse is at hand.'

'Bring him up, then, and come with me!'

'But my comrades? I must follow the train, that I may be able to return and rescue them.'

'You need not, for that purpose. There is one not far off who can aid you in that—better than the escort you speak of. If too late to save their lives, he may avenge their deaths for you. You say the caravan passed yesterday?'

'Yesterday, about noon.'

'You could not overtake it and return in time. The Red-Hand would be gone. Besides, you cannot get from here to the trail taken by the caravan, without going back by the cañon; and there you may meet those from whom you have escaped. You cannot cross there; the ridge is impassable.'

'As she said this, she pointed to the left—the direction which I had intended to take. I could see through a break in the bluff a precipitous mountain spur running north and south—parallel with the gorge I had been following. It certainly appeared impassable—trending along the sky like the escarpment of some gigantic fortress.

If this was true, there would be but little chance of my overtaking the escort in time. I had no longer a hope of being able to effect the rescue of my comrades. The delay no doubt had been fatal. In all likelihood, both Wingrove and Surebot had ere this been sacrificed to the vengeance of the Arapahoes, freshly excited by my escape. Only from a sense of duty did I purpose returning: rather with the idea of being able to avenge their death.

What meant this mysterious maiden? Who possessed the power to rescue my comrades from two hundred savages—the most warlike upon the plains? Who was he that could aid me in avenging them?

'Follow me, and you shall see!' said the huntress, in answer to my interrogatory. 'Your horse! your horse! Hasten, or we

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shall be too late. The Red-Hand in the valley of the Huerfano ; Wa-ka-ra will rejoice. Your horse ! your horse !'

I hastened back to my Arab, and led him up to the spot.

'A beautiful creature !' exclaimed she, on seeing the horse; no wonder you were able to ride off from your captors. Mount !'

'And you ?'

'I shall go afoot. But stay ! Time is precious. Can your horse carry us both ?'

'Undoubtedly he can.'

'Then it is better we should both ride. Half an hour is every thing; and if the Red-Hand should escape——You mount first—be quick !'

It was not the time to be squeamish—even under the glance of the loveliest eyes. Taking the robe from my shoulders, I spread it over the back of my horse ; and employing a piece of the lariat as a surcingle, I bound it fast. Into the improvised saddle I mounted—the girl from a rock leaping upon the croup behind me.

'You, Wolf !' cried she, apostrophising the dog : 'you stay here by the game, and guard it from the *coyotes*. Remember, rascal ! not a mouthful till I return. Now, stranger,' she continued, shifting closer to me, and clasping me around the waist, 'I am ready. Give your steed to the road, and spare him not, as you value the lives of your comrades. Up the ravine lies our way. Ho ! onward !'

The brave horse needed no spur. He seemed to understand that speed was required of him ; and, stretching at once into a gallop, carried us gaily up the gorge.

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CHAPTER LXXI.

A QUEER CONVERSATION.

In other days, and under other circumstances, the touch of that round arm, softly encircling my waist, might have caused the current of my veins to flow fast and fevered. Not so then. My blood was thin and chill: my soul recoiled from amatory emotions, or indulged in them only as a remembrance. Even in that hour of trial and temptation, my heart was true to thee, Lilian! Had it been thy arm that wound my waist—had those eyes that glanced over my shoulder been blue, and the tresses that swept it gold—I might for the moment have forgotten the peril of my companions, and indulged only in the ecstasy of a selfish love.

But not with her—that strange being with whom chance had brought me in such close companionship. For her I had no love-yearnings. Even under the entwining of that beautiful arm, my sense was cold, as if I was held in the embrace of a statue. My thoughts were not there.

My captive comrades were uppermost in my mind. Her promise had given me hope that they might yet be rescued. How? and by whom? Whither were we going, and whose was the powerful hand from which help was to come?

I would have asked: but our rapid movement precluded all chance of conversation.

I could only form conjectures. These pointed to white men—to some rendezvous of trappers that might be near. I knew there were such. How else in such a place could *her* presence be

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accounted for? Even that would but ill explain an apparition so peculiar as that of this huntress maiden.

Other circumstances, however, contradicted the idea that white men were to be my allies. There could be no band of trappers strong enough to attack the dark host of Red-Hand—at least with the chance of destroying it. She knew the strength of the Arapahoes. I had told her their number, as I had myself estimated it—nearly two hundred warriors. It was rare that white hunters mustered over a dozen men!

Moreover, she had mentioned a name—twice mentioned it—'Wa ka-ra.' No white was likely to bear such an appellation The word was undoubtedly Indian—especially as the huntress had pronounced it.

I waited for an opportunity to question her. It offered at length—where the path ran circuitously among some loose rocks and it was dangerous to go at a gallop.

I was about initiating a dialogue, when I was forestalled in my intention.

'You are an officer in the army?' said my companion, half-interrogatively.

'How should you have known that?' answered I in some surprise, perceiving that her speech was rather an assertion than a question.

'Oh! easily enough; your uniform tells me.'

'My uniform?'

'Yes. Have you not still a portion of it left?' inquired she with a striking simplicity. 'I see a mark where lace has been. That denotes an officer, does it not? The Arapahoes have stripped it off, I suppose?'

'There was lace—true—you have guessed correctly. I have been in the army.'

'And what was bringing you out here? On your way to the gold countries, I suppose?'

'No, indeed—not that.'

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'What then, may I ask?'

'Only a foolish freak. It was a mere tour without much purpose. I intended soon to return to the States.'

'Ah! you intend returning? But you say you were *following* the caravan—you and your three fellow-travellers. Why were you not *with* it? Would it not have been safer?'

I hesitated to make reply.

My interrogator continued.

It is not usual for so small a party to pass over the prairies alone. There is always danger from the Indians. Sometimes from the whites, too! Ah me! There are white savages—worse savages than red!—far worse—far worse!'

These strange words, with the sigh that accompanied them, caused me to turn my head, and steal a glance at the countenance of my companion. It was tinged with melancholy, or rather deeply impressed with it. She, too, suffering from the past?

In this glance I again remarked what had already attracted my notice—a resemblance to Lilian Holt! It was of the slightest, and so vague, that I could not tell in what it lay. Certainly not in the features, which were signally unlike those of Lilian: and equally dissimilar was the complexion. Were I to place the resemblance, I should say that I saw it in the cast of the eye, and heard it in the voice. The similitude of tone was striking. Like Lilian's, it was a voice of that rich clarion sound with which beautiful women are gifted—those having the full round throat so proudly possessed by the damsels of Andalusia.

Of course, the likeness was accidental. There was no possibility of its being otherwise; and I had not a thought that it was so. I was simply reminded of looks and tones that needed not that to recall them; but the souvenirs thus excited hindered me from making an immediate reply.

'Your observations are somewhat singular?' I remarked at length. 'Surely you have not verified them by your own experience?'

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'I have—yes, too sadly, ever to think them otherwise than just I have had little reason to love those of my own colour—that is, if I am to consider myself a white.'

'But you are so, are you not?'

'Not altogether. I have Indian blood in my veins.'

'Not much, I should fancy?'

'Enough to give me Indian inclinings, and a dislike to those of my own complexion.'

'Indeed!'

'Perhaps less from instinct than experience. Ah! stranger! I have reason. Is it not enough that all have proved false—lover, father, husband?'

'Husband! You are married, then?'

'No.'

'You have been?'

'No.'

'Why did you say husband?'

'A husband only in name. I have been married, but never a wife; wedded, but never'——

The speaker paused. I could feel her arm quivering around my waist. She was under the influence of some terrible emotion!

'Yours must be a strange story?' I remarked, with a view of inducing her to reveal it. 'You have greatly excited my curiosity; but I know that I have no claim to your confidence.'

'You may yet win it.'

'Tell me how?'

'You say you intend returning to the States. I shall have a commission for you; and you may then hear my story. It is not much. Only a simple maiden whose lover was faithless—her father untrue to his paternal trust—her husband a cheat, a perjured villain.'

'Your relationships have been singularly unfortunate; but your words only mystify me the more. I should give much to know who you are, and what strange chance has led you hither?'

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'Not now—time presses. Your comrades, if still alive, are in peril; that is your affair; but mine is that the Red-Hand may not escape. If he do, there's one who will grieve at it—one to whom I owe life and protection.'

'Of whom do you speak?'

'Of the mortal enemy of Red-Hand and his Arapahoes—of Wa-ka-ra.'

'Wa-ka-ra?'

'Head chief of the Utahs—you shall see him presently. Put your horse to his speed! We are close to the camp. Yonder are the smokes rising above the cliff! On, stranger! on!'

As directed, I once more urged my Arab into a gallop.

It was not for long. After the horse had made about a hundred stretches, the cañon suddenly opened into a small but beautiful *vallon*—treeless, but turfed with grass. The white cones, appearing in serried rows near its upper end, were easily identified as an encampment of Indians.

'Behold,' exclaimed my companion, 'the tents of the Utahs!'

CHAPTER LXXII.

WA-KA-RA.

The lodges were aligned in double row, with a wide avenue between them. At its head stood one of superior dimensions—the wigwam of the chief. They were all of conical shape—a circle of poles converging at their tops, and covered with skins of the buffalo, grained and bleached to the whiteness of wash-leather. A split in the front of each formed the entrance closed by a list of the hide that hung loosely over it; and near the top of each appeared a triangular piece of skin, projecting outward from the slope of the side, and braced, so as to resem

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like an inverted sail, of the kind known as *lateen*. It was a wind guard to aid the smoke in its ascent.

On the outer surface of each tent was exhibited the biography of its owner—expressed in picture-writing. More especially were his deeds of prowess thus recorded—encounters with the cougar and grizzly bear—with Crows, Cheyennes, Pawnees, and Arapahoes—each under its suitable symbol.

The great tent of the chief was particularly distinguished with this kind of emblematical emblazonment—being literally covered with signs and figures, like the patterns upon a carpet. No doubt, one skilled in the interpretation of these savage hieroglyphs, might have read from that copious cipher many a tale of terrible incident.

In front of each tent stood tall spears, with shields of *parfleché* leaning against them; also long bows of *bois d'arc* (*maclura aurantica*), and shorter ones of horn—the horns of the mountain ram. Skin-quivers, filled with arrows, hung suspended from the shafts; and I observed that in almost every grouping of these weapons there was a gun—a rifle

This did not astonish me. I knew that, to the Utah, the medicine weapon is no longer a mystery.

Here and there, hides freshly flayed were pegged out upon the grass, with squaws kneeling around them, engaged in the operation of graining. Girls, with water-tight baskets poised upon the crown of the head, were coming from or going towards the stream; men stood in groups, idly chatting, or squatted upon the turf, played at games of chance. Boys were busy at their bow-practice; and still younger children rolled their naked bodies over the grass, hugging half-grown puppies—the companions of their infant play. Troops of dogs trotted among the tents; while a mixed herd of horses, mules, sheep, goats, and donkeys browsed the plain at a little distance from the camp.

Such was the *coup d'œil* that presented itself to my gaze as we rode up to the Utah encampment.

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As might be expected, our arrival caused a change in the occupation of everybody. The dicers leaped to their feet—the squaws discontinued their work and flung down their scrapers upon the skins. '*Ti-ya!*' was the exclamation of astonishment that burst from hundreds of lips. Children screamed, and ran hiding behind their dusky mothers; dogs growled and barked; horses neighed; mules hinnied; while the sheep and goats joined their bleating to the universal chorus.

'On to the chief's tent!' said my companion, gliding to the ground, and preceding me on foot, 'yonder! the chief himself—Wa-ka-ra!'

An Indian of medium size, and perfect form, in leggings of scarlet cloth, tunic of embroidered buckskin, head-dress of coloured plumes, with crest that sweep backward and drooped down to his heels; a gaily striped *serape*, suspended scarf-like over the left shoulder, with a sash of red China crape, wound loosely around the waist, completed a costume more picturesque than savage.

A face of noble type, with an eye strongly glancing, like that of an eagle; an expression of features in no way fierce, but, like his dress, more gentle than savage; a countenance in repose, mild—almost to meekness.

Had I known the man who stood before me, I might have remarked how little this latter expression corresponded with his real character; not that he was cruel, but only famed for warlike prowess. I was face to face with the most noted war-chief of America: whose name, though new to me, was at that moment dreaded from Oregon to Arispe, from the banks of the Rio Bravo to the sierras of Alta California. It was *Walker*—the war-chief of the Utahs—the friend of the celebrated trapper, whose name he had adopted; and which, by the modification of Utah ortheopy had become *Wa-ka-ra*.

An odd individual—a very odd one—was standing beside the chief as I rode up. This appeared to be a Mexican, to judge by

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his costume and the colour of his skin. The former consisted of *casqueta* and *calzoneros* of dark coloured velveteen, surmounted by a broad-brimmed *sombrero* of black glaze; while the complexion, although swarth, was several shades lighter than that of an Indian. He was a man of diminutive stature, and with a countenance of a serio-comical cast. An expression of this kind pervaded his whole person—features and figure included—and was heightened by the presence of a singular accoutrement, that hung suspended from his leathern waist-belt. It was a piece of timber some eighteen inches in length, and looking like the section of a boot-tree, or the half of a wooden milk-yoke. At the thick end was a concavity or socket, with straps, by which it was attached to the belt; and this odd apparatus hanging down over his thigh, added to the grotesque appearance of its owner.

The little Mexican had all the cut of a 'character;' and he was one, as I afterwards learned. He was no other than the famous Pedro Archilete, or 'Peg-leg,' as his comrades called him—a trapper of Taos, and one of the most expert and fearless of that fearless fraternity.

The odd accoutrement which had puzzled me was nothing more than an artificial leg, which, however, he only used upon occasions; whenever the natural one—the ankle of which had been damaged by an Indian bullet—gave out through the fatigue of a march. At other times, he carried the wooden leg, as I first saw it, suspended from his belt!

His presence in the Indian encampment was easily accounted for. He was in alliance with their chief, for the Utahs were at that time *en paz* with the settlements of the Taos Valley; and the Spanish trappers and traders went freely among them.

Peg-leg had been on a trapping expedition to the Parks; and by accident, or otherwise, had become the guest of Wa-ka-ra.

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CHAPTER LXXIII.

PEG-LEG.

'The white huntress, has returned soon?' said the chief, as the girl glided up to him. 'She brings strange game!' added he with a smile. 'Who is the young warrior with the white circle upon his breast? He is a pale-face? It is not the custom of our white brothers to adorn themselves in such fashion?'

'The painting is not his,' replied the girl. 'It has been done by the hands of his enemies—by red men. The white circle was designed for a mark, at which many bullets have been fired. The red streaks you see are blood, that has streamed from wounds inflicted on the stranger's body. When Wa-ka-ra shall know who caused that blood to flow, he will hasten to avenge it.'

'If it be the wish of the white huntress, Wa-ka-ra will avenge the blood—even though his own people may have spilled it. Speak, Ma-ra-nee! You say that red men have done this—were they Utahs?'

'No—but the enemies of the Utahs.'

'The Utahs have many enemies—on the north, south, east, and west they have foes—whence comes the white stranger! and who has been spilling his blood?'

'From the east—from the *Arapahoes*.'

'Ugh!' exclaimed the chief with a start, his countenance suddenly becoming clouded with an angry expression. 'Arapahoes? Where has the pale-face encountered the Arapahoes?'

'On the Huerfano.'

'Good—the white huntress brings news that will gladden the

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hearts of the Utah warriors! Arapahoes on the Huerfano who saw them there?'

The huntress replied by pointing to me.

'He has been their captive,' she added, 'and has just escaped from them. He can guide Wa-ka-ra to their camp, where the Utah chief will find his deadliest enemy—Red-Hand.'

At the mention of this name, the cloud that was gathering upon the brow of the Utah chief became darker by several shades, and the mild expression was no longer observable. In its place was a look of fierce resolve, blended with glances that spoke a savage joy. Some old and terrible resentment was rekindled by the name, with a hope no doubt of its being gratified.

The chief now commenced a series of interrogatories. He spoke English—thanks to his trapper associations. It was in this language he had been conversing with the huntress. His inquiries were directed to such particulars as might put him in possession of the necessary knowledge for an attack upon the Arapahoes; and, as rapidly as possible, I made known their position and numbers—with other circumstances calculated to aid in the design.

The account seemed to satisfy him; and as soon as it was given, he declared his intention to proceed to the valley of the Huerfano. To me it was joyful news: my comrades might yet be rescued from their cruel fate!

'Ma-ra-nee!' said he, addressing himself to the huntress, 'take the stranger to your tent! Give him food. And you, Cyr, he continued, turning to the little Mexican, 'you are skilled in medicine—look to his wounds! He can repose, while we are preparing. Ho! sound the signal of *assembly!* Summon our braves to the war-dance!'

The last words were addressed to an Indian who stood in the rear of the tent. Quickly succeeding them, the notes of the bugle burst upon the air—strange sounds in an Indian camp!

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But the white man's music was not the only sign of civilised life to be observed among the tents of the Utahs. The guns and pistols—the spurs, lances, and saddles—the shakos and helmets—all spoke of spoiled *presideos* on the Mexican frontier—while the fair-skinned *donzellas* of Spanish race were seen mingling with the copper-coloured squaws—aiding them in their domestic duties—captives apparently contented with their captivity!

None of this was new to me. I had witnessed similar scenes in the land of the Comanche. They are of daily occurrence along the whole frontier of Spanish America—where the red man constantly encroaches—reclaiming the country of his ancestors, wrested from him three centuries ago by the cupidity of the *Conquistadores*. Upon his side now lies the strength—if not in numbers, at least in courage and war-prowess. The horse he once dreaded is now his dearest friend; and he can manage him with a skill scarcely equalled by his pale-faced adversary. The lance and fire-weapon are in his hands; the spirit-thunder no longer appals him: he knows its origin and nature: and uses it in the accomplishment of a terrible retaliation. On the northern continent, Utah and Yaqui, Kiowa and Comanche, Apache and Navajo, have all proved their superiority over the degenerated descendants of Cortez; as in the south have the Chuncho and Cashibo, Goajiro, and Auracanian, over those of the ruthless Pizarro.

The red man no longer goes to war as a mere savage. He has disciplined his strength into a perfect strategy; and possesses a military system as complete as that of most civilised nations. The Comanche cavalry charges in line; and can perform evolutions to the call of the bugle!

So can the Utah, as I had evidence at that moment. Before the trumpet-notes had ceased to reverberate from the rocks, five hundred warriors had secured their horses, and stood armed and ready to mount. A regiment of regular dragoons could not have responded to 'Boots and saddles' with greater expedition!

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Peg-leg took possession of me.

'Señor Pintado!' said he, speaking in Spanish, and after having examined my wounds, 'the best medicine for you will be your breakfast; and while your *compaisana* is preparing it, you can come with me, and have a little water thrown over you. This painting does not improve your looks; besides, if it get into your wounds, they will be all the more difficult to make a cure of. Come on!'

The huntress had retired to a tent that stood near that of the chief, and a little to the rear of it. I followed the Mexican, who, in a hobbling gait, proceeded towards the stream.

The cold bath, assisted by some Taos brandy from the gourd bottle of the trapper, soon restored my strength; and the hideous pigment, lathered with the bruised roots of the *palmilla*—the soap-plant of the New Mexicans—soon disappeared from my skin. A few slices of the *oregano* cactus applied to my wounds, put them in a condition to heal with a rapidity almost miraculous—for such is the curative power of this plant. My Mexican *medico* was yet more generous; and furnished me with a handsome Navajo blanket that served as a complete covering for my shoulders,

'*Carrambo!*' said he, as he tendered the garment, 'take it, *Americano!* You may be able to repay me when you have recovered your possible-sack from the Arapahoes. *Mira!*' he added, pointing towards the tents—'your breakfast is ready: yonder the *señorita* is calling you. Take heed, *hombre!* or her eyes may cause you a more dangerous wound than any you have had from the bullets of the Arapahoes. *Vaya!*'

I resisted my inclination to make inquiries, though the hint of the Taos trapper half furnished me with an excuse. My 'country-woman,' he had called her. No doubt he knew more of her history; but I questioned him not. Remembering her promise, I had hopes that I might learn it from her own lips.

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CHAPTER LXXIV.

A BEAUTIFUL HOSTESS.

'Aha, stranger!' said she, as I approached the tent, 'he has altered your appearance wonderfully. Oh! you are not so frightful now. Come in! Here is *piñole*, and a little broiled goat's flesh. I am sorry I did not bring some of the wild sheep. It is most excellent; but in my haste I did not think of it Bread I cannot give you: we never have it here.'

'I have been accustomed to ruder fare than this,' said I, accepting the proffered viands, and without further ceremony, seating myself to discuss them.

There was an interval of silence, during which I continued eating. Once or twice, my hostess went out, returning again to see if anything was wanted. The warlike preparations going on outside appeared greatly to interest her; and I thought she regarded them with impatience, or as if anxious about the event.

Who or what was the object of this solicitude? Wa-ka-ra? In what relationship stood she to the chief? A captive she could scarcely be: else would she not have been permitted to stray so far from the encampment? His wife? The separate tent, as also the style used by the Utah in addressing her, negatived the idea. What, then? I longed to hear the history of the wild huntress, but the opportunity had not yet arrived.

'Ah!' said she, returning once more within the tent, I fear they will be too late. The red post is only just now erected; and the war-dance may last for an hour. It is a useless ceremony—only a superstition. The chief himself does not believe

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in it, but his braves will not go to battle without performing it Hark! they are commencing the chant!'

I caught the low monotone of many voices, gradually rising and swelling into a prolonged chorus. At intervals, one was heard speaking in solo: as if proclaiming some distinguished deed, to incite the warriors to emulation. Then followed a clangour of yells, and loud whoops breathing menace and revenge.

'It is the war-song that accompanies their dance,' added she. 'You may rest till it is finished. Then you must be ready: they will ride off as soon as the ceremony is over.'

She flung herself on one of the buffalo-robes that covered the floor of the tent; and half seated, half reclining, appeared to reflect. The attitude displayed a womanly form of magnificent outlines; and with a face dazzlingly beautiful, this singular woman presented a picture something more than attractive.

'Wa-ka-ra must love her!' thought I.

As I made this reflection, I again observed the melancholy shade upon her countenance; and once more the resembance to her of whom I was thinking!

My interest in the beautiful huntress was every moment augmenting. I felt an indescribable yearning to hear the story of her misfortunes—for in no other light could I regard the situation in which I had found her.

'You have promised to tell me of yourself,' said I, reminding her of what she had said.

'I shall keep my promise upon the condition, of which I have forewarned you.'

'Name it then—if not impossible, I am ready to accept it.'

'It is not impossible—though it may tax your generosity more than you expect. You have said that you intend returning to the States. Will you take me with you?'

A start must have betrayed my astonishment at the unexpected request.

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'Willingly,' I replied; 'but now—I fear—it is impossible'

'Your journey is not ended? Is that what you mean?'

'Alas! I know not when or where it may end.'

'That is strange! but you intend to go back sometime! Till then, let me be your travelling companion?'

The proposal left me for the moment without a word to say.

'Oh, do not refuse me!' continued she, in an appealing tone; 'I will wait upon you; I will hunt for you—anything, but longer I cannot stay here. With all their kindness—and they have been kind, in their own rude fashion—I cannot remain. I long for the society of civilised beings. O stranger, I cannot tell you how I long to see one!'—— She hesitated.

'Whom?' I asked, in hopes of hearing a name.

'A sister—a sweet gentle sister, who loved me as her own life—whom I loved more than my life. Oh, not till we were parted knew I the strength of that love.'

'How long since you have seen her?'

'Six months ago, I left her—deceived by a villain, I left her—six years it has seemed! Oh! I cannot endure this savage life. They honour me—they give me all the hospitality in their power—but I am not happy. Stranger, say you will relieve me from this terrible existence? Say you will take me with you?'

'I freely promise it, if it be your desire. But what of these? Will they—will *he* consent?'

'Who?'

'Wa-ka-ra.'

'Yes—yes! He has said I may go whenever an opportunity should offer. Brave chief! he has nobly kept his word, to him who is now no more.'

'To whom?'

'To him who saved my life—to him who saved me—— Ah! see, the chief approaches! the war-song is ended. At another time, I shall tell you all; but not now. We must haste, or the warriors will be gone.'

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'Surely you do not intend to accompany us?'

'The women follow at a distance, to take care of the wounded I go with them.'

The voice of Wa-ka-ra calling to me to join him and his warriors put an end to a dialogue that had done but little to illustrate the story of the strange personage by my side.

If possible, I was more mystified than ever; but it was not a time to be tempted by the lure of an idle curiosity, however interesting the theme. The perilous situation of my old comrades came once more vividly before my mind, recalling me to my duty; and, hurrying from the presence of that beautiful being —that I hoped soon to behold again—I leaped upon the back of my horse, and joined the Utah warriors, as they swept in full gallop from out the lines of their encampment.

CHAPTER LXXV.

EFFECTING THE SURROUND.

The ride was rough and rapid. Notwithstanding the superiority of my steed, it was as much as I could do to keep pace with my new allies, whose horses, used to all sorts of ground, went gliding along the uneven path as if they had been graded roads. Through tangled bushes they scrambled without stay, over sharp and slippery rocks, their unshod hoofs rendering them sure-footed as mountain sheep.

Down the gorge lay our route; and paths over which I almost feared to walk my horse, were now passed in a quick continuous gallop.

We soon reached the scene of my encounter with the huntress The dog still kept sentry over game. Couchant by the body of the bighorn, he only growled as the cavalcade swept past. No

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one stopped to relieve him of his charge. On a war-expedition the chase is universally neglected. Even its spoils are spurned Hunger is supposed to beget prowess, as it sharpens the wits; and the savage fights best upon an empty stomach.

The hurried movements of the Indians—the eagerness each one exhibited to press forward—proved how earnest they were on this expedition. It was not my affair that was stimulating them to such speed. A tribal hostility of long standing—older than the warriors themselves—existed between Utah and Arapaho. Between the bands of Wa-ka-ra and Red-Hand the hostile inheritance had increased until it had reached the maximum of the most deadly *vendetta*.

This will account for the hot haste with which we hurried on —not for the universal excitement that prevailed in the ranks of my Utah allies. They knew that they outnumbered their enemies. They already exulted in the anticipation of a grand *coup*.

For all that, they were not rushing recklessly into battle. The Utah chieftain was too skilled a soldier. I perceived that he was acting upon a preconceived plan; and his strategy was now made known to me.

It was that of the 'surround.' The band was to break up in four divisions of nearly equal numerical strength. The first, under Wa-ka-ra himself, was to go round by the bluffs; and, having worked its way into the lower cañon, would enter the plain from that direction. Should the Arapahoes attempt to retreat towards the Arkansas, this party would intercept them.

A second division—also keeping above the bluffs—would make to a point nearly opposite the butte; where, by a ravine known to the Indians, a descent could be made into the valley of the Huerfano.

A third was to seek its station upon the opposite side—where a similar defile led down to the plain; while the remaining warriors were to move forward by the upper cañon and halt at its

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mouth, until the other three parties were known to have reached their respective places.

At a signal agreed upon, all four divisions were to move forward at a rapid gallop, and close in upon the enemy. The first party were to give the cue, as it had furthest to go: and, by the time it could reach its destination, the others would be ready. A smoke was to be the signal for charging forward.

The plan was well conceived; and if it should prove that the Arapahoes were still by the butte, a fight *à outrance* might be looked for as the certain result. They would have no alternative but fight.

The execution of the movement was soon entered upon. Near the place where I had passed the last hours of the night, a side ravine—which, in the darkness I had not observed—sloped up out of the gorge. By cañons and deep defiles the whole face of the country was cut up in this *bipinnate* fashion—every pass of it being well known to the Utahs. Hence their confidence in being able to effect the surround of the Arapahoes—less familiar with this region; and who must have been tempted thither by the passage of the train.

Up the lateral ravine went Wa-ka-ra with his dusky warriors, while the second division, intended to take station on the bluff defiled by the same track, but more slowly

The others kept on down the gorge.

On reaching the main cañon, the party destined for the opposite bluff separated from the other, and proceeded circuitously by a branch ravine that opened above.

The fourth and last division rode direct down the banks of the river, upon the path by which I had been pursued. This division was in charge of the second chief; and to it was I myself assigned, with Peg-leg, who was also a volunteer, as my immediate companion. The trapper had himself some old scores to settle with the Arapahoes; and appeared as eager for the fight as any Utah in the tribe.

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Apprehensive of falling in with some straggling pursuers of the preceding night, we moved forward with caution. The sub chief was an old warrior, whose scars and grizzled hair betokened experience of many a hostile encounter, and no doubt many a cunning stratagem. Scouts were sent out in advance; and these, returning from time to time, signalled that the path was clear.

Advancing in this fashion, we at length reached the embouchure of the cañon, and halted within its gloomy shadow.

As yet not an Arapaho had been seen; but, on climbing to a ledge of rocks, I had the satisfaction to perceive that the enemy was still by the butte. I saw not them, but their horses—the *cavallada* being almost in the position in which I had left it!

From this it was evident that they had returned from the pursuit—had abandoned it altogether, and given their steeds to the grass. A few only of the men were in sight—moving about among the fires, that still burned upon the plain; but the strength of the *cavallada* told that the others were there—no doubt, concealed from view by the interposed mass of the mound.

I saw the wagon by its base—the white tilt conspicuous against the dark green foliage of the cedars—but my eyes dwelt not upon this. In rapid glance, they were carried to the summit.

The crucifix was still there. I could trace its timbers—its upright and horizontal beams—though not distinctly.

I knew what was rendering their outlines indistinct. There was a body upon the cross—the body of a man. It was that which interrupted the regularity of the lines.

The timbers were between me and the body—for I viewed it from behind—and at such a distance, I could not have told who was the crucified man, even had he been facing me. Wingrove or Sure-shot—one or the other? Of that much I was certain.

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I could make out that the man was naked, just as I had been myself: I saw the white skin glistening along each side of the upright post.

While gazing upon it, I heard the report of a musket. Nearly at the same instant, a little white cloud was seen ascending into the air. It rose from behind the butte; and was easily recognisable as smoke produced by the discharge of a gun. The savages had returned to their cruel sport. Too clearly did I comprehend the signs of that fiendish exhibition.

After regarding the crucifix for a while, I noted a circumstance that enabled me to decide which of my comrades was undergoing the terrible ordeal. To a certainty, Sure-shot was the sufferer.

The Red-Hand had fulfilled his threat; and my brave preserver was now promoted to my place.

The circumstance that guided me to this knowledge was sufficiently definite. I could tell it was Sure-shot by his height. I remembered that my own crown scarcely reached the top of the upright post. That of him now enduring the torture rose above it by the head. Under the bright sunbeam, there was a sheen of yellow hair. That of Wingrove would have appeared black. Beyond doubt, Sure-shot was the martyr now mounted upon that dread cross!

I viewed the spectacle with feelings not to be envied. My soul chafted at the restraint, as it burned with bitter indignation against these demons in human form. I should have rushed forward to stay the sacrifice, or, if too late, to satisfy the vengeance it called forth; but I was restrained by reflecting on the impotency of the act. The prudent chief who commanded the Indians would not move, till the smoke-signal should be seen; and videttes had climbed far up on the cliff, to watch for and announce it.

It was not anticipated that we should have long to wait Our party had moved slowly forward; and the time consumed

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in our advance was considerable—almost enough to have enabled the others to get to their respective stations.

This thought—along with my experience of the ball-practice of the Arapahoes—in some measure reconciled me to the delay. If he upon the cross was still living, his chances of escape were scarcely problematical. Another shot or two from such marksmen would be neither here nor there.

If the man were already dead, then was the delay of *less* consequence: we should still be in time to avenge him.

But he was *not* dead. The proof that he was living was before my eyes; though, in the confusion of the moment, I had not sooner perceived it. Above the top of the post appeared the head held stiffly upright. This proved that the body still lived. Had it been otherwise, the head would have been drooping.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

THE HISTORY OF THE HUNTRESS.

I HAD just made this observation as the Mexican clambered up the rock, and took stand by my side.

'*Hijo de Dios!*' exclaimed he, as his eyes fell upon the cross, '*la crucifixion!* What a conception for savages! See!' he continued, as another white cloud puffed out from behind the sloping side of the mound, and the report came thundering up the valley, *Santisima!* they are firing at the unfortunate!'

'Yes,' said I; 'they are playing with one of my comrades, as they did yesterday with myself.'

'Ah, *mio amigo!* that is an old game of the Arapahoes. They used to practise it with their arrows, and for mere sport. Now that they have taken to guns, I suppose they combine instruction with amusement, as the books say. *Carrambo!* what

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cruel brutes they are! They have no more humanity than grizzly bears. God help the poor wretch that falls into their clutches! Their captive women they treat with a barbarity unknown among other tribes. Even beauty that would soften a savage of any other sort, is not regarded by these brutal Arapahoes. Only think of it! They were about to treat in this very fashion the beautiful *Americana*—the only difference being that they had strapped her to a tree instead of a crucifix. *Carrambo!*'

'The beautiful Americana?'

'Yes—she who brought you to the camp.'

'What! She in the hands of the Arapahoes?'

'*Sin duda:* it was from them she was taken.'

'When, and where? How, and by whom?'

'*Hola! hombre*—four questions in one! *Muy bien!* I can answer them, if you give me time. To the first, I should say about six months ago; to the second, near the Big Timbers, on the Arkansas. My reply to the third will take more words; and before giving it, I shall answer the fourth by saying that the girl was taken from the Rapahoes by Don José.'

'Don José—who is Don José?'

'Oh! perhaps you would know him by his American name? Oaquer?'

'Walker, the celebrated trapper? Joe Walker?'

'The same, *amigo*. Oaquara, the Utahs pronounce it: as you perceive, their young chief is named so, and after him. The trapper and he were sworn friends—brothers—or more like father and son: since Don José was much the older.'

'*Were* friends. Are they not so still?'

'*Valga me dios!* No. That is no longer possible. Don José has gone under—was rubbed out more than three months ago, and by these very Rapahoes! That is why your fair *compaisana* is now with the Utahs. The old trapper left her to his namesake, Oaquara; under whose protection she has been ever since.

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'He has been true to his trust? He *has* protected her?'

Under the influence of singular emotions, did these questions escape me.

'*Seguramente, amigo!*' replied the Mexican, with an ingenuousness calculated to allay my unpleasant fancies, 'the Utah chief is a noble fellow—*un hombre de bien*—besides, he would have done anything for his old friend, whose death greatly grieved him. That is just why you see him here in such haste. It was not to avenge your wrongs that they danced their war-measure—but the death of Don José. All the same to you · ince your *compañeros* are likely to have the advantage of it.'

'As for the Americana,' continued he, before I had time to make rejoinder, '*Virgen santisima*' such a maiden was never seen in these parts. Such a shot! Not a marksman in the mountains could match with her, except Don José himself, who taught her; and as for hunting—*la linda cazadora!* she can steal upon the game like a cougar. Ah! she can protect herself. She has done so. But for her spirit and rifle, the Red-Hand would have ruined her.'

'But how? you have not told me'——

'True, cavallero! I have yet to answer number three. Bueno! As I said, it was near the Big Timbers, where she got into the hands of the Arapahoes. There was only a small band of the robbers, with Red-Hand at their head. He wanted to play the brute with her. She kept him off with her rifle and a big dog you have seen. Red-Hand became angry, and had her strapped to a tree—where the monsters threatened to shoot their arrows into her body. Whether they intended to kill her, or only to terrify the poor girl, is not known; but if the former was their design, they were hindered from putting it in execution Just at that moment, Don José came upon the ground with a party of trappers from the rendezvous on Cuerno Verde. They were strong enough to beat off the red-skinned ravishers, and save the Americana. That is how she was taken from the Rapahoes.

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'A brave deed! But how did she chance to be there? Since Bent's Fort was abandoned, there is no white settlement near the Big Timbers.'

'Ah! señor? that is the strangest part of the whole story. It was told me by Don José himself, while we were *campañeros* on a trapping expedition, just after he had saved the girl. *Carrambo!*—a strange tale!'

'Have you any objection to tell it to me? I feel a singular interest in this young girl.'

'*Sin duda!* of many a mountain man the same might be said, and many an Indian, too. Hum! *cavallero!* you would not be flesh and blood, if you didn't.'

'Not *that*, I assure you. My interest in her springs from a different source. I have other reasons for inquiring into her history.'

'You shall have it then, *cavallero*—at least so much as I know of it myself; for it is reasonable to suppose that Don José did not tell me all he knew. This much; the *niña* was with a caravan that had come from one of your western states. It was a caravan of Mormons. You have heard of the Mormons, I suppose—those *hereticos* who have made settlements here beyond?'

'I have.'

'Well—one of these Mormons was the husband of the girl, or rather *ought* to have been—since they were married just at starting. It appears that the young woman was against the marriage—for she loved some one more to her choice—but her father had forced her to it; and some quarrel happening just at the time with the favourite lover, she had consented—from pique, *sin duda*, to accept the Mormon.'

'She did accept him?'

'Yes—but now comes the strange part of the story. All I have told you is but a common tale, and the like occurs every day in the year.'

'Go on.'

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'When she married the Mormon, she did not know he *was* a Mormon; and it appears that these *hereticos* have a name among your people worse than the very *Judios*. It was only after the caravan had got out into the plains, that the girl made this discovery. Another circumstance equally unpleasant soon came to her knowledge; and that was, that the man who pretended to be her husband, was after all no husband—that he did not act to her as a husband should do—in short, that the marriage had been a sham—the ceremony having been performed by some Mormon brother in the disguise of a padre!'

'Was the girl's father aware of this deception?'

'Don José could not tell. He may have known that the man was a Mormon; but Don José was of opinion that the father himself was betrayed by the false marriage—though he was present at it, and actually bestowed the bride!'

'Strange!'

'Perhaps, cavallero! the strangest is yet to come. For what purpose, do you suppose, was this deception practised upon the poor girl?'

'I cannot guess—go on!'

'*Carrai!* it was a hellish purpose; but you shall hear it. These Mormons have at their head a great chief priest—a *prophéta*, as they call him. He is a polygamist—a perfect Turco—and keeps a harem of beautiful *niñas*, who pass under the name of "spiritual wives." It was only after the young Americana had got far out upon the plains—indeed to the Big Timbers, where she escaped from him—that she found out the terrible fate for which her false husband had designed her. She learned it from the other women who accompanied the caravan; and who, base wretches that they were, rather envied her the *honour* by which she was to be distinguished! *Por Dios!* a terrible fate for a young creature pure and virtuous like her!'

'Her fate? Quick—tell me! for what had the villain destined her?'

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'*Virgen Santa*. for the harem of the Mormon prophet!

'*Mira!*' exclaimed the Mexican, almost in the same breath—'*Mira!* the signal smoke of Wa-ka-ra! To horse! to horse *mueran los Arapahoes!*'

It was not the signal that called from my lips a convulsive exclamation—it was wrung from my agony, ere the smoke had been descried. It was drowned amid the shouts of the savage warriors, as they crowded forward through the chasm.

Leaping down from the ledge, and flinging myself on the back of my horse, I mingled in the mêlée.

As we swept forth from the gorge, I cast a glance behind. Female voices had caused me to look back. The Utah women, mounted on mules and horses, were coming down the cañon, with the white huntress at their head!

I wished a word with *her*—but it was too late. I dared not go back. My Utah allies would have branded me as a coward—a traitor to my own cause.

I did not hesitate a moment; but joining in the 'Ugh-aloo,' I dashed into the midst of the dusky host, and galloped onward to the charge.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE SURPRISE.

The white cloud—a puff of powder-smoke—had scarcely scattered in the air, when a dark mass appeared upon the plain, emerging from the sulphureous vapor. It was a troop of horsemen—the warriors of Wa-ka-ra. On giving the signal, they had issued forth from the lower cañon, and were coming on at a gallop.

They were too distant for us to hear their charging cheer; but from right and left came a double shout—a war-cry answering

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to our own—and the moment after a stream of dusky forms was seen pouring down each bluff, through the sloping gorges that led to the plain.

We could hear the shout that announced the astonishment of the Arapahoes. It betokened more than astonishment; there was terror in its wild intonations.

It was evident that they had been taken altogether by surprise, having no suspicion that an enemy was near—least of all the dreaded foe who was now rushing forward to surround them.

The red men are never betrayed into a panic Accustomed from earliest youth to war with all its wiles, they are ever prepared for a *stampede*. It is the system they themselves follow, and are ever expecting to be practised against them. They accept the chances of attack—no matter how sudden or unforeseen—with all the coolness of a contest premeditated and prearranged. Even terror does not create confusion in their ranks—for there are no ranks—and in conflicts with their own race, combinations that result from drill and discipline are of little consequence. It is usually a fight hand to hand, and man to man—where individual prowess prevails, and where superior personal strength and dexterity conduct to conquest. It is for this reason that the scalp-trophy is so highly prized; it is proof that he who has taken it must have fought to obtain it. When 'hair is raised' in a night attack—by the chance of an arrow or bullet—it is less esteemed.

By the laws of Indian warfare, the stratagem of assassination is permissible, and practised without stint: but a *coup* of this kind is far less glorious, than to slay an enemy in the open field, and under the broad glare of the sunlight. In conflicts by day, strategy is of slight advantage, and superior numbers are alone dreaded.

It was the superior numbers of their Utah enemies that caused terror in the ranks of the Arapahoes. Otherwise, they would not have regarded the mode of attack—whether their assailants

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advanced upon them in a single body, or in four divisions, as they were doing.

Indeed it was merely with a view of cutting off their retreat, that the Utah chieftain had adopted the plan. Had he not taken the precaution to approach from all sides at once, it would have been necessary for him to have waited for the night, before any attack could have been made. In daylight, it would have been impossible to get even within shot-range of the enemy. The Arapahoes were as well mounted as the Utahs; and perceiving their inferiority in numbers, they would have refused the fight, and ridden off, perhaps, without losing a man.

The strategic manœuvre of the Utah was meant to force the Red-Hand to a conflict. This was its purpose, and no other.

It was likely to be successful. For the Arapahoes there seemed no alternative but fight.

The attack, coming from four points at one and the same time, and by superior numbers, must have caused them fear. How could it be otherwise?

It failed, however, to create any remarkable confusion. We could see them hurrying around the butte, in the direction of their *cavallada*—and, in an incredibly short space of time, most of the warriors had leaped to horse, and with their long spears towering high over their heads, had thrown themselves into an irregular formation.

The plain at this moment presented an animated spectacle. He upon the summit of the butte, if still alive, must have viewed it with singular emotions. The painted Arapahoes clustered around their chief, and for the moment appearing in a close crowd, silent and immobile; from north, south, east, and west, the four bands of the Utahs approaching in rapid gallop, each led by its war-chief: while the 'Ugh! aloo!' pealing from five hundred throats, reverberated from cliff to cliff, filling the valley with its vengeful echoes! The charge resembled a chapter from the antique—an onslaught of Scythians!

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Would the Arapahoes await the shock of all four divisions a once? All were about equally distant, and closing in at equal speed. Surely the Red-Hand would not stay to be thus attacked?

'*Carrambo!* I wonder they are not off before this!' shouted Archilete, who was galloping by my side.

'Ha! yonder!' added he, 'a party on foot making from the *alamos*. They are waiting for them to come up—that's what's been detaining them. *Mira!*'

As the Mexican spoke, he pointed to a small tope of cottonwoods which grew isolated about three or four hundred yards from the mound. Out of this was seen issuing some fifteen or twenty Arapahoes. They were on foot; except three or four that appeared to be carried by the others.

'Their wounded!' continued the trapper. 'They've had them under the bushes, to keep the sun off them I suppose. *Mira!* they are meeting them with horses! They mean flight.'

A party with led horses were seen galloping out from the base of the butte, evidently to take up the men on foot—who were still hurrying towards their mounted comrades as fast as the nature of their duty would permit them.

There were several little knots of the Indians on foot—each, no doubt, in charge of a disabled comrade.

One crowd appeared to encircle a man who was not borne upon their shoulders, but was moving forward on his own feet. The violent gesticulations of those who surrounded him caught our attention. The man was evidently being menaced and urged forward—as if he went against his will'

'*Carrai!*' exclaimed the Mexican, '*he* is not one of their wounded. A captive! one of your *camarades*, is he not?'

'No doubt of it,' I replied, at that moment equally guided to the conjecture.

'Wagh!' exclaimed the trapper, 'the poor fellow's scalp's in danger just now. I wonder they take all that trouble to get

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him away alive!—that puzzles me, *amigo!* I think it high time they looked to their own lives, without being so dainty about that of their prisoner. *Santisima Virgen!* As I live, there's a woman among them!'

'Yes, I see her—I know her. Her presence explains why they are taking him alive.'

'You know her!'

'And him too. Poor fellow! I hope she will befriend him but'——

I was hindered from continuing the explanation. Just at that moment, the led horses were rushed up; and those in charge of the wounded were seen to spring to their backs. Here and there, a double mount proclaimed that the disabled men were still capable of making a last effort for their lives.

All had got upon their horses, and in a straggling crowd were making to join the main band, when just then one of the horses that carried two men was seen to swerve suddenly from the line, and, heading up the valley, come galloping in our direction The horse appeared to have taken fright, and run away from the others: while the men upon his back were wriggling and writhing about as if trying to restrain him!

At the same instant, half-a-dozen mounted Arapahoes shot forth from the crowd, and with loud yells started in pursuit of the runaway!

The double-loaded steed—a powerful animal—kept on his course; and not until he had approached within three or four hundred paces of our own front, could I account for this strange manœuvre. Then was I enabled to comprehend the mysterious escapade. The rider upon the croup was Frank Wingrove!

He upon the withers was a red Arapahoe, and the bodies of the two men appeared to be lashed together by a raw-hide rope; but in front of the Indian I could perceive the muscular arms of the young backwoodsman tightly embracing the body of the sav

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age, while with the reins in his fingers he was guiding the gallop of the horse.

With a shout of joy I hailed the escape of my comrade—now no longer problematical. In a score of seconds more we should meet. The pursuers, satisfied that his recapture was hopeless, without risking their own scalps, turned with a despairing shout, and galloped back.

Wingrove was near enough to hear the cry of encouragement that passed from my lips; and soon recognising me, despite the disguise of the serape, headed his horse directly towards me.

'Hooraw, capt'n!' cried he as he came up. 'Hev you e'er a knife to cut me clar o' this Indyen? Durn the niggur! I've got *him* in a leetle o' the tightest fix he's been in for a while, I eck'n. Dog-gone ye! keep still, ye skunk, or I'll smash every rib in your body? Quiet now!'

During all this time the Indian was making the most strenuous efforts to free himself from the grasp of his powerful adversary—now endeavouring to throw himself down from the horse, anon trying to turn the animal in an opposite direction. But the thongs intended to secure his captive—and which had no doubt been wound around both by a third hand—had become bonds for himself. Wingrove, who had by some means wrenched his wrists free from their fastenings, had turned the tables upon his captor, by transforming him into a captive!

I chanced to have no knife, but the Mexican was supplied with the necessary article; and drawing it from its sheath, shot past me to use it. I thought he intended to cut the thongs that bound the two men together; and so did he; but not till after he had performed another operation, which consisted in plunging his blade between the ribs of the Arapahoe! At the stab, the Indian gave utterance to his wild death-shout. At the same instant, his head coggled over upon his shoulder, his body relaxed its muscular tension, and hung limp over the raw-hide rope.

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A twig of the red blade severed the thong; and the Indian's body sliding down from the shoulder of the horse, fell with a dull dead sound upon the turf!

'Here, *Americano!*' cried the trapper, holding out the ensanguined knife to Wingrove; 'take this weapon for want of a better. Let us on! See, the *picaros* are making off. *Vamos! nos vamonos!*'

The little incident had delayed us but for a very short while—perhaps not half a minute; but as we returned to the charging gallop, most of our party had passed us; and the foremost were already within rifle-range, and opening fire upon the Arapahoes.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

THE CHARGE.

The horsemen that had forged ahead for a while hindered me from seeing the enemy. The Utahs had halted, and were discharging their guns. The smoke from their shots shrouded both allies and enemy; but from the fact of a halt being made, I fancied the Arapahoes were making stand by the butte?

It was not so. After the first round of shots, the firing ceased and the Utahs again went charging onward. The Arapahoes had given way, and were fleeing down the valley. There they must meet Wa-ka-ra!

And this, or something like it, was their intention. With the four divisions closing upon them from all sides at once, they saw there was no chance of saving themselves, except by making a desperate charge on some one singly, in the hope of causing it to yield, and thus open for them a way of escape. They had no difficulty in making choice. The band of Wa-ka-ra was between them and their own country. It was the direction in which they

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must ultimately retreat, and this had decided them to take down the valley.

A slight swell in the plain, which we were at that moment crossing, gave me a view of the retreating Arapahoes. In the distance I could see the band of Wa-ka-ra coming on at full speed. In a few seconds would meet in a shivering charge these mortal foes.

The Utahs on our side were again urging their horses to utmost speed. Well mounted as were myself and companions, we were unable to overtake them.

Those that came from right and left had suddenly swerved from their course; and in two converging lines were sweeping down the valley to the assistance of their chief.

We passed close under the edge of the butte. In the excitement of the chase, I had almost forgotten to look up, when a shrill shout recalled to my memory the captive on the cross. The cry came from the summit, from Sure-shot himself. Thank heaven, he lived!

'Hooza! hoozay!' shouted the voice. 'Heaving speed yees, whos'ever ye be! Hooza! hoozay! Arter the verming, an' gie 'em goss! Sculp every mother's son o' em. Hoozay! hoozay!'

There was no time to make reply to these words of encouragement. Enough to know that it was our old comrade who gave utterance to them. It proved he was still safe; and, echoing his exulting shout, we galloped onward.

It was a fearful sight to behold the two dark bands as they dashed forward upon one another—like opposing waves of the angry ocean. Through the horseman in front of me, I could see the meeting and hear the shock. It was accompanied by wild yells—by voices heard in loud taunting tones—by the rattling of shields, the crashing collision of spear-shafts, and the sharp detonations of rifles.

The band of Wa-ka-ra recoiled for a moment. It was by far the weakest; and had it been left to itself, would have sustained defeat in this terrible encounter; but the Utahs were armed with

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both rifles and pistols; and the latter playing upon the ranks of the Arapahoes were fast thinning them. Dusky warriors were seen dropping from their horses; while the terrified animals went galloping over the field—their wild neighs adding to the uproar of the fight.

There was but one charge—a short but terrible conflict, and then the fight was over. It became transformed, changed almost in an instant to a disorderly flight—the remnant of the prairie horsemen heading down the valley, followed by the four bands of the Utahs—who, having now closed together, pressed onward in the pursuit, still yelling their wild '*Ugh! aloo!*' and firing shots at intervals as they rode within reach of their flying foemen.

Neither Wingrove nor I had an opportunity of taking part in the affray. It was over before we could ride up; and indeed, had it been otherwise, neither of us could have been of much service to our allies. Painted as both were, and in full war-costume—in other words, naked to the breech-clout—we could not have distinguished friends from foes; and it was this that occasioned us to halt.

We drew up on the ground where the collision had occurred with the band of Wa-ka-ra. We looked upon a spectacle that might at any other time have horrified us. A hundred bodies lay over the sward all dead. There were Utahs as well as Arapahoes; but, though we could not distinguish the warriors of the two tribes in the confusion of the fight, there was no difficulty in identifying their dead. There was a signal difference in the aspect of the slain Indians. Around the skulls of the Utahs, the thick black tresses were still clustering, while upon the heads of the Arapahoes there was neither hair nor skin: every one of them had been already scalped!

Wounded men were sitting up or propped against dead bodies—each with two or three comrades bending over him. Horses were galloping around, their lazos trailing at will: and weapons of every kind—spears, shields, bows, quivers, and arrows—were

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strewed over the sward. A group of about a dozen men appeared at some distance, clustered around a particular object It was the dead body of a man—a chief, no doubt? Not without feelings of apprehension did I approach the spot. It might be the noble Wa-ka-ra?

I rode up, and looked over the shoulders of those who encircled the corpse. A glance was sufficient to put an end to my apprehensions. The body was covered with blood, and pierced with many wounds. It was frightfully mutilated; but I was able to identify the features as those of Red-Hand, the chief of the Arapahoes! Scarred and gashed though it was, I still could trace those sinister lines that in life had rendered that face so terrible to behold. It was even more hideous in death; but the Utahs who stood around no longer regarded it with fear. The terror their dread foeman had oft inspired within them, was now being retaliated in the mockery of his mutilated remains!

The Mexican had learned that Wa-ka-ra was still safe, and heading the pursuit. Having myself no further interest in the scene, I turned away from it: and, with Wingrove by my side, hurried back towards the butte.

CHAPTER XXIX.

TRAGIC AND COMIC.

Some words passed between us as we rode back. For my companion, I had news that would make him supremely happy. Our conversation turned not on that. Soon enough, thought I, when they should come together. Let both hearts be blessed at the same time.

Ah! how my own was bleeding? Little suspected the Spanish hunter how his tale had tortured me!

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Wingrove, in brief detail, gave me the particulars of his escape. Like myself, he had been captured, without receiving any serious wound. They would have killed him afterwards, but for the interference of the Chickasaw—who by some means had gained an ascendency over the Red-Hand.

In the breast of this desperate woman burned intermittently the passions of love and revenge. The former had been for the time in the ascendant; but she had saved the captive's life, only in the hope of making him *her* captive. She had carried him to the copse, where he had passed the night in her company—one moment caressed and entreated—in the next reviled and menaced with the most cruel death?

In vain had he looked for an opportunity to get away from her. Like a tigress had she watched him throughout the live-long night; and it was only in the confusion, created by our sudden approach, that he had found a chance of escape from the double guardianship in which he had been held. All this was made known in a few hurried phrases.

Sure-shot! we were within speaking distance; but who could have identified the Yankee in such a guise? The tri-colored escutcheon I had myself so lately borne—the black face, shoulders, and arms—the white circle on the breast—the red spot—all just as they had painted me!

'Jeehosophet an' pigeon-pie!' cried he, as he saw us approach; 'air it yeou, capting? an' Wingrove teoo!'

'Yes—brave comrade! Your shot has saved us all. Patience! we shall soon set you free!'

Leaping down from our horses, we hurried up the sloping path. I was still anxious about Sure-shot's safety but in another moment my anxiety was at an end. He was yet unscathed.

Like myself, he had received some scratches, but no wound of a dangerous character. Like myself, he had died a hundred deaths, and yet lived!

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His gleesome spirit had sustained him throughout the dread ordeal. He had even joked with his cruel tormentors!

Now that the dark hour was past, his *jeux d'esprit* were poured forth with a continuous volubility. No—not continuous At intervals, a shadow crossed his spirit, as it did that of all of us We could not fail to lament the fate of the unfortunate Hibernian.

'Poor Petrick!' said Sure-shot, as we descended the slope, 'he weer the joyfulest kimrade I ever hed, an' we must gi' him the berril o' a Christyan. I wonder neow what on airth them verming hes done wi' him? Wheer kin they hev hid the body?'

'True—where is it? It was out yonder on the plain? I saw it there—they had scalped him.'

'Yees—they skulped him at the time we weer all captered. He weer lying jest out theer last night at sundown. He ain't theer now; nor hain't a been this mornin', or I'd a seed him. Whet do ees think they 've done wi' him anyhow?'

The disappearance of the body was singular enough, It was certainly removed from the spot where it had lain; and was now nowhere to be seen!

It was scarcely probable that the wolves had taken it—for the Indians had been all night upon the ground; and their camp-fires were near. True, the *coyotes* would have cared little for that; but surely the brutes could not have carried the body clear off? The bones at least would have remained? There were none—not a trace either of body or bones?

We passed around the butte, and made search on the other side. There was no dead body there—no remains of one!

Ha, the river! It swept past within fifty yards of the mound. It would account for the disappearance of the corpse. Had the Indians thrown it into the stream?

We walked towards the water, half mechanically. We had little expectation of finding the remains of the unfortunate man The current rushed rapidly on: the body would have been carried along with it.

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'Maybe it mout have lodged somewheres?' suggested Sure shot. 'Ef we shed find it, capting, I'd like to put a sod over him, for old times' sake. Shall we try down the stream?'

We followed the bank downward. A little below grew wil lows—forming a selvidge to the river's edge. Their culms curved over till the long quivering leaves dipped into the water. Here and there were thickets of them extending back into the plain. Only by passing through these could the bank of the river be reached.

We entered among the willows, Wingrove going in the advance. I saw him stoop suddenly, as if to examine the ground An exclamation escaped him, and the words:

'Someb'dy's crawled through hyar, or been dragged through, one.'

'No!' continued he after a moment; 'he's not been dragged: he's been creepin' on his hands an' knees. Look thar! the track o' a knee, as clar as daylight; an', by the 'tarnal! it's been covered with broad-cloth. No Indyen ked a made that sign!'

We all bent over to examine the sign. Sure enough, it was the track of a man's knee; and the plastic mud exhibited on its surface a print of fretted lines which must have been made by coarse threadbare cloth!

'By Gosh!' exclaimed Sure-shot, 'that eer's the infantry overall—the giverment cloth to a sartingty. Petrick's been abeout heer. Lordy, tain't possyble he's still livin'?'

'Shure-shat! Shure-shat! Mother ov Moses! is it yersef I hear;

The voice reached us in a hoarse whisper. It appeared to rise out of the earth!

For some moments, we all stood as if petrified by surprise.

'Shure-shat!' continued the voice, 'wont yez help me out? I'm to wake to get up the bank.'

'Petrick, as I'm a livin' sinner! Good Lordy, Petrick! wheer air ye? Tain't possyble yeer alive?'

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'Och, an' sure I'm aloive, that same; but I'm more than half ded, for all that, an' nearly drownded to boot. Arrah, boys! raich me a hand, an' pull me out—for one of my legs is broke.'

All together we rushed down to the water—whence the voice appeared to come. Under the drooping willows, where the current had undermined the bank, an object was seen in motion—a fearful object to look upon. It was the encrimsoned skull of our scalped comrade!

His body was submerged below the surface; his head was alone visible—a horrid sight!

The three of us leaped at once into the stream; and, raising the poor fellow in our arms, lifted him out on the bank. It was as he had alleged. One of his legs was broken below the knee; and other frightful wounds appeared in different parts of his body. No wonder the Indians had believed him dead, when they stripped off that terrible trophy!

Notwithstanding the ill usage he had received, there was still hope. His wounds, though ugly to look upon, were none of them mortal. With care, he might recover; and, taking him up as tenderly as we could, we conveyed him back to the butte.

The Arapahoes had left their *impedimenta* behind them—blankets and robes at discretion. With these, a soft couch was prepared under the shadow of the wagon; and the wounded man placed upon it. Such rude dressing as we were able to give, was at once administered to his wounds; and we found new joy in the anticipation of his recovery.

His disappearance from the spot where he had been left for dead, was explained. He had 'played 'possum,' as he himself had expressed it. Though roughly handled, and actually senseless for a time, he had still clung to life. He knew that the Indians believed him dead, else why should they have scalped him?

With a faint hope of being left upon the field, he had lain still without stirring hand or foot; and the savages, otherwise occu-

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plied, had not noticed him after taking his scalp. By some accident, his hands had got over his face; and perceiving that these screened his countenance from observation, he had permitted them to remain so. With half-opened eyes, he could see between his fingers; and note many of the movements that were passing upon the plain in front of him—all this without the Indians having the slightest suspicion that he lived!

It was a terrible time for him—an ordeal equal to that endured by Sure-shot and myself—for every now and then some half drunken savage would come staggering past; and he knew not how soon some of them might stick a spear into him, out of mere wantonness!

On the arrival of night, his hopes had revived; and the cool air had also the effect of partially restoring his strength. The savages, carousing around their fires, took no notice of him; and, as soon as darkness was fairly down, he commenced crawling off in the direction of the river.

He had a double object in going thither. He was suffering from horrid thirst; and he hoped there to find relief as well as a better hiding-place. After crawling for more than an hour, he had succeeded in reaching the bank; and, taking to the water, he had waded down, and concealed himself under the willows in the place where we had found him.

Such was the adventure of the *ci-devant* soldier, Patrick O'Tigg—an escape almost miraculous!

As if fulfilling the laws of dramatic justice—that the farce should succeed the tragedy—our attention was at this moment called to a ludicrous incident. The Mexican trapper had ridden up, and halted beside the wagon, when all at once his eyes became fixed upon an object that lay near at hand upon the grass. It was the black silk hat of the ex-rifleman, already mentioned in our narrative.

After gazing at it for a moment, the Mexican slid down from his horse, and hobbling towards the tile, took it up Then utter

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ing a fierce *Carajo*, he dashed the hat back to the ground, and commenced stamping upon it, as if it had been some venomous serpent he desired to annihilate.

'Hilloo! theer, *Hombre!*' shouted Sure-shot. 'What the ole scratch air ye abeout? Why, ye yeller-bellied fool, thet's my *hat* yeer stompin' on.'

'*Your* hat! echoed the trapper in a contemptuous tone. *Carrambo, señor!* you should be ashamed of yourself; any man to wear a silk hat? Wagh!'

'An' why ain't a silk hat as good's any other?'

'*Maldita sea!*' continued the trapper, taking the wooden leg from his waist, and hammering the hat with it against a stone—'*maldito sombrero!* but for that accursed invention, we poor trappers wouldn't be as we are now. *Carrambo!* it's fetched beaver down to a plew a plng: while only ten years ago, we could get six *pesos* the skin! Only think of that! *Carai-i-i!*'

Pronouncing this last exclamation with fierce aspirate, the incensed trapper gave the unfortunate hat one more blow with his timber leg, and then, spurning the battered tile from his toe, hobbled back to his horse!

Sure-shot was disposed to be angry, but a word set all right. I perfectly comprehended the nature of the trapper's antipathy against silk hats, and explained it to my comrade. In their eyes, the absurd head-gear is more hideous than even to those who are condemned to wear it—for the trappers well know that the introduction of the silk hat has been the ruin of their peculiar calling.

'Twan't much o' a hat, atter all,' said Sure-shot, reconciled by the explanation. 'It b'longed to the sutler at the Fort, an' you see, capting, as we left theer in a leetle bit o' a hurry, I couldn't lay my claws on my own ole forage-cap; so I took the hat in its place; thet's how I kim by the thing. But heer's a hat: preehaps, mister, this heer'll pleeze ye, will it?'

As Sure-shot put the question, he took up the plumed bonnet

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of an Arapaho warrior—which had been left lying among the rocks—and, adjusting the gaudy circlet upon his head, strode backward and forward over the ground with all the swelling majesty of an Indian dandy!

The odd-looking individual and his actions caused the laughter of the by-standers to break forth in loud peals. The Mexican fairy screamed, interlarding his cachinnations with loud 'santisimas,' and other Spanish exclamations; while even the wounded man under the wagon was unable to restrain himself at the mirth-provoking spectacle.

CHAPTER LXXX.

SPIRITUAL WIVES.

I JOINED not in the merriment of my companions; I took no share in their mirth. The trapper's story had intensified the anguish of my thoughts; and now that I found time to dwell upon it, my reflections were bitter beyond expression.

I could have no doubt as to who was the heroine of that strange history. She who had been so shamefully deceived—she who had so nobly risked her life to save her honour—she the wild huntress by the Utahs called *Maranee*—could be no other than that *Marian* of whom I had heard so much—Marian Holt!

The circumstances detailed by the trapper were all conformable to this belief—all concurred in establishing it. The time—the place—the route taken—the Mormon train—all agreed with what we had ascertained regarding Stebbins' first expedition across the prairies. The Mexican had mentioned no names. It was likely he knew them not; or if so, it was scarcely probable he could have pronounced them.

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It needed not names to confirm me in the belief that Josh Stebbins was the sham husband, and that she whom he would have betrayed—this huntress maiden—was the lost love of my comrade Wingrove—the sister of my own Lilian.

This would account for the resemblance that had struck me. It no longer seemed vague; in my memory, I could trace it palpably and clearly.

And this was the grand beauty upon which the young backwoodsman had so enthusiastically descanted. Often had he described it to my incredulous ear. I had attributed his praises to the partiality of a lover's eye—having not the slightest suspicion that their object was possessed of such merits. No more should I question the justice of his admiration, nor wonder at its warmth. The rude hyperbole that had occasionally escaped him, when speaking of the 'girl'—as he called her—no longer appeared extravagant.

In truth, the charms of this magnificent maiden were worthy of metaphoric phrase. Perhaps, had I seen her first—before looking upon Lilian—that is, had I not seen Lilian at all—my own heart might have yielded to this half-Indian damsel? Not so now. The gaudy tulip may attract the eye, but the incense of the perfumed violet is sweeter to the soul. Even had both been presented together, I could not have hesitated in my choice. All the same should I have chosen the gold and the rose; and my heart's preference was now fixed, fondly and forever.

My love for Lilian Holt was a passion too profound to be otherwise than perpetual. It was in my bosom—in its innermost recesses, all pervading, all absorbing. There would it cling till death.

Even in those dread hours when death seemed hovering above my head, the thought of her was uppermost—even then did my mind dwell upon the perils that encompassed her path.

And now that I was myself delivered from danger, had I reason to regard the future of my beloved with apprehensions les

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acute? No. The horrid scheme which the trapper's story had disclosed in regard to her sister—might not she too be the victim of a similar procuration? O Heaven! it was too painfully probable; and the more I dwelt upon it, the more probable appeared this appalling thought.

I have already spoken of my experience of Mormon life, and the insight I had incidentally obtained of its hideous characteristics. I have said that the *spiritual-wife* doctrine was long since exploded—repudiated even by the apostles themselves; and in its place the *many-wife* system had been adopted. There was no change in reality—only in profession. The practice of the Mormon leaders had been the same from the beginning; only that then polygamy had been carried on *sub rosa*. Publicity being no longer dreaded, it was now practised 'openly and above board.'

We term it polygamy—adopting an Oriental phrase. It is nothing of the kind. Polygamy presupposes some species of marriage according to the laws of the land; but for Mormon matrimony—at least that indulged in by the dignitaries of the church—there were no statutes except such as they had chosen to set up for themselves. The ceremony is simply a farce, and consists in the sprinkling of a little water by some brother apostle, with a few mock mesmeric passes, jocosely termed the 'laying on of hands!' The cheat is usually a secret performance: having no other object than to overcome those natural scruples—not very strong among women of Mormon training—but which sometimes, in the case of young girls of Christian education, had opposed themselves to the designs of these infamous impostors.

Something resembling matrimony may be the condition of a Mormon wife—that is, the wife of an ordinary 'saint,' whose means will not allow him to indulge in the gross joys of polygamy. But it is different with the score or two of well-to-do gentlemen who finger the finances of the church—the tenths and other tributes which they contrive to extract from the common

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herd. Among these the so-called 'wife' is regarded in no other light than that of *une femme entretenue.*

I knew that one of the duties specially enjoined upon those emissaries termed 'apostles,' was to gather young girls from all parts of the world. The purpose was proclaimed with all the affectation of sanctified phraseology: that they should become 'mothers in the church,' and by this means lead to the more rapid increase of the followers of the true faith!

This was the public declaration intended for the common ear. But the leaders are actuated by motives still more infamous. Their emissaries have instructions to select the fairer forms of creation; and it is well known that to making converts of this class are their energies more specially directed.

It was this species of proselytising—alas! too often successful—that more than aught else had roused the indignation of the backwoodsmen of Missouri and Illinois, and caused the expulsion of the Saints from their grand temple city of Nauvoo.

In the ranks of their assailants were many outraged men—fathers who looked for a lost child—angry brothers seeking revenge for a sister lured from her home—lovers who lamented a sweetheart beguiled by that fatal faith; and no doubt the blood of the pseudo-saints, there and then shed, was balm to many a chafed and sorrowing spirit.

In the category of this uxorious infamy, no name was more distinguished than that of him, on whose shoulders the mantle of the prophet had descended—the chief who now held ascendancy among these self-styled saints; and who, with an iron hand, controlled the destinies of their church.

A man cunning and unscrupulous; a thorough plebeian in thought; but possessed of a certain pretentious polish, well suited to deceive the stupid herd that surrounds him, and sufficient for the character he is called upon to play—a debauchee boldly declared, and scarcely caring for the hypocrisy of concealment—above all, a thorough despot, whose will is law to all around him;

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and, when needing enforcement, can at any hour pretend to the sanction of authority from Heaven—such is the head of the Mormon Church!

With both the temporal and spiritual power in his hands—legislative, executive, and judicial united—the fiscal, too, for the prophet is the sole treasurer of the *tenths*—this monster of imposition wields a power equalled only by the barbaric chiefs of Africa, or the rajahs of Ind. It might truly be said that both the souls and bodies of his subjects are his and not their own. The former he can control, and shape to his designs at will. As for the latter, though he may not take life openly, it is well known that his sacred edict issued to the 'destroying angels' is equally efficacious to kill. Woe betide the Latter-day saint who dares to dream of dissent or apostasy! Woe to him who expresses disaffection or even discontent! Too surely may he dread a mysterious punishment—too certainly expect the midnight visitation of the *Danites!*

Exercising such influence over Mormon men, it is almost superfluous to add that his control over Mormon women is still more complete. Virtue, assailed under the mask of a spiritual hypocrisy is apt to give way—alas! too easily—in all parts of the world: but in a state of society where such slips are rather a fashion than a disgrace, it is needless to say that they are of continual occurrence. The practice of the pseudo-prophet in wife-taking has very little limit, beyond that fixed by his own desires. It is true, he may not outrage certain formalities, by openly appropriating the wives of his followers: but should he fancy to become the *husband* of their daughters, not only is there no opposition offered on their part, but the base proposal is regarded in the light of an honour! So esteemed it the women from whom Marian Holt had run away—preferring the perils of starvation and savage life, to such gentle companionship!

Thus contemplating the character of that vulgar Alcibiades, for whose harem she had been designed—in full knowledge of the

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circumstances which now surrounded her sister, how could I deem the situation of Lilian otherwise than similar—her destiny the same?

With such a tyrant to betray, such a father to protect, no wonder that I trembled for her fate! No wonder that the drops of sweat—forced from me by my soul's agony—broke out like beads upon my brow!

CHAPTER LXXXI.

THE DEATH-SONG.

Prostrated in spirit, I had sunk down among the rocks, covering my face with my hands. So occupied was I with wild imaginings, that I saw not the Utah women as they passed down the valley. They had not come up from the butte, nor made halt near, but had hurried directly onward to the scene of the conflict. I had for the moment forgotten them; and was only reminded of their proximity on hearing the death-wail as it came pealing up the valley. It soon swelled into a prolonged and plaintive chorus, interrupted only by an occasional shriek, that denoted the discovery of some relative among the slain—father, brother, husband, or perhaps still nearer and dearer, some worshipped lover—who had fallen before the spears of the Arapahoes.

Was Maranee among them?

The thought roused me from my revery of wretchedness. A gleam of joy had shot suddenly across my mind. It was the wild huntress that had given origin to it—on her a hope rested.

She must be seen! No time should be lost in communicating

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with her Had she accompanied the women of the tribe? Was she upon the ground?

I rose to my feet, and was going towards my horse. I saw Wingrove advancing towards me. The old shadow had returned to his brow. I might exult in the knowledge of being able to dispel it—once and forever. Fortunate fellow! little dreamed he at that moment how I held his happiness in my hand—how with one word I could raise from off his breast the load that for six long months had weighed heavily upon it!

Yes—a pleasant task was before me. Though my own heart bled, I could stop the bleeding of his—of hers, both in a breath. Now, or not yet?

I hesitated. I can scarcely tell why. Perhaps it was that I might enjoy a double delight—by making the disclosure to both of them at once? I had a sweet surprise for both—to both, no doubt, it would be a revelation that would yield the most rapturous joy.

Should I bring them face to face, and leave them to mutual explanations? This was the question that had offered itself, and caused me to hesitate and reflect.

But no. I could not thus sport with hearts that loved. I could not procrastinate the exquisite happiness now so near. At once let them enter upon its enjoyment!

But both could not be made happy exactly at the same instant. One or other must be first told the glad truth that was in store for them. Apart they must be told it; and to which was I to give the preference?

I resolved to follow that rule of polite society which extends priority to the softer sex. Wingrove must wait!

It was only with an effort I could restrain myself from giving him a hint of his proximate bliss. I was sustained in the effort, however, by observing the manner in which he approached me. Evidently he had some communication to make that concerned

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our future movements? Up to that moment there had been no time—even to think of the future.

'I've got somethin' to say to you, capt'n,' said he, drawing near and speaking in a serious tone: 'it's better, maybe, ye shed know it afore we go furrer. The girl's been givin' me some particlers o' the caryvan that I haint told you.'

'What girl?'

'The Chickasaw—Su-wa-nee.'

'Oh—true. What says she. Some pleasant news I may anticipate, since she has been the bearer of them?'

It was not any lightness of heart that caused me to give an ironical form to the interrogative. Far from that.

'Well, capt'n,' replied my comrade, 'it's rayther ugly news the red-skinned devil told me: but I don't know how much truth thar's in it; for I've foun' her out in more'n one lie about this bizness. She's been wi' the caryvan, however, and shed know all about it.'

'About what?' I asked.

'Well, Su-wa-nee says that the caryvan's broke up into two.'

'Ha!'

'One helf o' it, wi the dragoons, hes turned south, torst Santa Fe; the other, which air all Mormons, hev struck off northardly, by a different pass, an' by a trail thet makes for thar new settlements on Salt Lake.'

'There's not much news in that. We had anticipated something of the kind?'

'But thar's worse, capt'n.'

'Worse!—what is it, Wingrove?'

I put the question with a feeling of renewed anxiety.

'Holt's gone wi' the Mormons.'

'That too I had expected. It does not surprise me in the least.'

'Ah! capt'n,' continued the backwoodsman with a sigh, while an expression of profound sadness pervaded his features. 'thar's uglier news still.'

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'Ha!' I involuntarily exclaimed, as an evil suspicion crossed my mind. 'News of *her*? Quick! tell me! Has aught happened to *her*?'

'The worst that kud happen, I reck'n—*she's dead!*'

I started as if a shot had passed through my heart. Its convulsive throbbing stifled my speech; I could not get breath to utter a word; but stood gazing at my companion in silent agony.

'Arter all,' continued he, in a tone of bitter resignation, 'I don know ef it *air* the worst. I sayed afore, an' I say so still, thet I'd ruther she war dead than in the arms o' thet ere stinkin' Mormon. Poor Marian! She's hed but a short life o't, an' not a very merry one eyther.'

'What! Marian? Is it of her you are speaking?'

'Why, sartin, capt'n. Who else shed it be?'

'Marian dead?'

'Yes—poor girl, she never lived to see that Salt Lake city—whar the cussed varmint war takin' her. She died on the way out, an' war berryed sm'rs on the paraireys. I wish I knew whar. I'd go to see the grave.'

'Ha! ha! ha! Whose story is this?'

My companion looked at me in amazement. The laugh, at such a time, must have sounded strange to his ears.

'The Indyen heerd it from Lil,' replied Wingrove, still puzzled at my behaviour. 'Stebbens had told it to Holt, an' to her likeways. Poor young creetur! I reck'n he'll be a wantin' her too, now thet he's lost the other. Poor little Lil!'

'Cheer, comrade, cheer! Either Su-wa-nee or Stebbins has lied—belike both of them, for both had a purpose to serve—the Mormon to deceive the girl's father,—the Indian to do the same with you. The story is false. Marian Holt is *not* dead.'

'Marian ain't dead?'

'No, she lives—she has been true to you. Listen.'

I could no longer keep from him the sweet secret. The reac

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tion—consequent on the bitter pang I had just experienced, while under the momentary belief that it was Lilian who was dead—had stirred my spirit, filling it with a wild joy. I longed to impart the same emotions to my suffering companion; and in rapid detail I ran over the events that had occurred since our parting.

To the revelations which the Mexican had made, Wingrove listened with frantic delight—only interrupting me with frenzied exclamations that bespoke his soul-felt joy.

When I had finished, he cried out:

'She war *forced* to go! I thort so! I knew it! Whar is she, capt'n? For God's sake take me to her. I'll fall on my knees. I'll axe her a thousand times to pardon me. 'Twar the Indyen's fault. I'll swar it war the Chickasaw. She's been the cuss o' us both. Oh! whar is Marian? I love her more than iver. Whar is she?'

'Patience!' I said; 'you shall see her presently. She must be down the valley among the women. Mount your horse, and follow me!'

CHAPTER LXXXII.

MARANEE.

We had ridden around the butte, and come in sight of the crowd of wailing women, when some one on horseback was seen emerging from their midst, and turning head towards us.

The habiliments of the rider told that she was a woman. I recognized the Navajo scarf, and plumed circlet, as those worn by the wild huntress. It was she who had separated from the crowd!

Had I needed other evidence to identify her, I had it in the large wolf-like animal that was bounding after her, keeping pace with the gallop of her horse.

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'Behold!' I said. 'Yonder is Marian—your own Marian!'

'It are, as I'm a living man! I mightn't a know'd her in that strange dress, but you's her dog. It's Wolf. I kud tell him anywhar.'

'On second thoughts,' suggested I, 'perhaps, I had better see her first, and prepare her for meeting you? What say you?'

'Jest as you like, capt'n. P'raps it mout be the better way.'

'Ride behind the wagon, then! Stay there till I give you a signal to come forth.'

Obedient to the injunction, my companion trotted back, and disappeared behind the white tilt.

I saw that the huntress was coming towards the mound; and, instead of going forth to meet her, I remained upon the spot where we had halted.

A few minutes sufficed to bring her near; and I was impressed more than ever with the grand beauty of this singular maiden.

She was mounted in the Indian fashion, with a white goat-skin for a saddle, and a simple thong for a stirrup; while the bold style in which she handled her horse, told that, whatever had been her early training, she of late must have had sufficient practice in equestrian manœuvres. The steed she bestrode was a large chestnut-coloured mustang; and as the fiery creature reared and bounded over the turf, the magnificent form of its rider was displayed to advantage. She still carried her rifle; and was equipped just as I had seen her in the morning, but now sharing the spirit of her steed, and further animated by the exciting incidents—still in the act of occurrence—her countenance exhibited a style of beauty, not the less charming from the wildness and *braverie* that characterized it.

Truly had she merited the hyperbole of praise which the young backwoodsman had oft lavished upon her. To all that he had said, the most critical connoisseur would have given his accord. No wonder that Wingrove had been able to resist the

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facinations of the simpering syrens of Swampville—no wonder that Su-wa-nee had solicited in vain! Truly was this wild huntress an attractive object—in charms far excelling the goddess of the Ephesians. Never was there such mate for a hunter! Well might Wingrove rejoice at the prospect before him!

Her voice roused me from my reverie of admiration.

Ho stranger!' said she, reining up by my side, 'you are safe, I see! All has gone well?'

'I was in no danger: I had no opportunity of entering into the fight.'

'So much the better—there were enough of them without you. But your fellow-travellers? Do they still survive? I have come to inquire about them.'

'Thanks to you and good fortune, they are still alive—even he who was scalped, and we had believed to be dead.'

'Ah! is the scalped man living?'

'Yes; he has been badly wounded, and otherwise ill used; but we have hopes of his recovery.'

'Take me to him! I have learned a little surgery from my Indian friends. Let me see him! Perhaps I may be of some service to your comrade?'

'We have already dressed his wounds, and I believe nothing more can be done for him except by time. But I have another comrade who suffers from wounds of a different nature, *which you alone can cure.*'

'Wounds of a different nature!' repeated she, evidently puzzled by my ambiguous speech; 'of what nature, may I ask?'

I paused before making reply. Whether she had any suspicion of a latent meaning to my words, I could not tell. If so, it was not openly evinced, but most artfully concealed by the speech that followed.

'During my stay among the Utahs' said she, 'I have had an opportunity of seeing wounds of many kinds, and have learnt their mode of treating them. Perhaps I may know how to de

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something for those of your comrade? But you say that I *alone* can cure them?'

'You, and you only.'

'How is that, stranger? I do not understand you?'

'The wounds I speak of are not in the body.'

'Where, then?'

'In the heart.'

'Oh! stranger, you are speaking in riddles. If your comrade is wounded in the heart, either by a bullet or an arrow'——

'It is an arrow.'

'Then he must die: it will be impossible for any one to save him.'

'Not impossible for you. You can extract the arrow—you can save him!'

Mystified by the metaphor, for some moments she remained gazing at me in silence—her large antelope eyes interrogating me in the midst of her astonishment. So lovely were those eyes, that had their irides been blue instead of brown, I might have fancied they were Lilian's! In all but colour, they looked exactly like hers, as I had once seen them.

Spell-bound by the resemblance, I gazed back into them without speaking—so earnestly and so long that she might easily have mistaken my meaning. Perhaps she did so, for her glance fell; and the circle of crimson suffusion upon her cheeks seemed slightly to extend its circumference, at the same time that it turned deeper in hue.

'Pardon me!' said I, 'for what may appear unmannerly I was gazing at a resemblance.'

'A resemblance!'——

'Yes! one that recalls the sweetest hour of my life.'

'I remind you of some one, then?'

'Ay—truly.'

'Some one who has been dear to you?'

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'Has been, and *is*.'

'Ah! and who, sir, may I have the fortune to resemble?'

'One dear also to you—*your sister!*'

'My sister!'

'Lilian.'

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

OLD MEMORIES AWAKENED.

The reins dropped from her hands—the rifle fell upon the neck of her horse, and she sat gazing at me in speechless surprise. At length, in a low murmur, and as if mechanically, she repeated the words:

'My sister Lilian?'

'Yes, Marian Holt—your sister.'

'My name? How can you have known it? You know my sister?'

'Know her and love her—I have given her my whole heart.'

'And she—has she returned your love?'

'Would that I could say surely yes! Alas! I am still in doubt.'

'This is strange. O sir, tell me who you are! I need not question what you have said. I perceive that you know my sister—and who I am. It is true: I am Marian Holt—and you? you are from Tennessee?'

'I have come direct from it.'

'From the Obion? Perhaps from'——

'From your father's clearing on Mud Creek, Marian.'

'Oh, this is unexpected—what fortune to have met you, sir! You have seen my sister?'

'I have.'

'How long has it been since you saw her?'

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Scarcely a month.'

So lately! And how looks she? She is well?'

How looks she?—Beautiful, Marian, like yourself. She was so, too, when I last saw her.'

Dear Lilian!—how glad I am to hear she is well, and beautiful! I know she is—very, very beautiful. Ah! me—they said I was so too, but my good looks have been lost in the wilderness. A life like that I lead soon takes the softness from a girl's cheeks. But Lilian! O sir! tell me of her! I long to hear of her—to see her. It is but six months, and yet I think it six years since I saw her. Oh! how I long to fold my arms around her! to twine her beautiful golden hair around my fingers, to gaze into her blue innocent eyes!'

My heart echoed the longings.

'Sweet little Lilian! Ah!—little—perhaps not, sir. She will be grown by this. A woman like myself.'

'Almost a woman.'

'Tell me, sir—did she speak of me? Oh, tell me—what said she of her sister Marian?'

The question was put in a tone that betrayed anxiety. I did not leave her to the torture of suspense; but hastily repeated the endearing expressions that Lilian had uttered in her favour.

'Good, kind Lil! I knew she loves me as I do her—we had no other companions—none I may say for years, only father himself. And father—is he well?'

There was a certain reservation in the tone of this interrogatory, that contrasted strangely with that used when speaking of her sister. I well knew why.

'Yes,' I replied, 'your father is also well.'

There was a pause that promised embarrassment—a short interval of silence. A question occurred to me that ended it.

'Is there no one else about whom you would desire to hear?'

I looked into her eyes as I put the question. The colour upon her cheeks went and came like the changing hues of the

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chameleon Her bosom rose and fell in short convulsive breathings; and despite an evident effort to stifle it, an audible sigh escaped her.

The signs were sufficient. I needed no further confirmation of my belief. Within that breast was a souvenir, that in interest far exceeded the memories of either sister or father. The crimson flush upon her cheek, the quick heaving of the chest, the half-hindered sigh, were evidence palpable and pronounced. Upon the heart of Marian Holt was the image of the handsome hunter—Frank Wingrove—graven there, deeply and never to be effaced.

'Why do you ask that question?' at length she inquired in a voice of assumed calmness. 'Know you anything of my history? You appear to know all. Has any one spoken of me?'

'Yes—often—one who thinks only of you.'

'And who, may I ask, sir, takes this single interest in a poor outcast maiden?'

'Ask your own heart, Marian! or do you wish me to name him?'

'Name him!'

'Frank Wingrove.'

She did not start. She must have expected that name, since there was no other to be mentioned. She did not start, though a sensible change was observable in the expression of her countenance. A slight darkling upon her brow, accompanied by a pallor and compression of the lips indicated pain.

'Frank Wingrove,' I repeated, seeing that she remained silent

'I know not why I should have challenged you to name him,' said she, still preserving the austere look. 'Now that you have done so, I regret it. I had hoped never to hear his name again. In truth, I had well-nigh forgotten it.'

I did not believe in the sincerity of the assertion. There was a slight tincture of bravado in her tone that belied it. It was the lips alone that were speaking, and not the heart.

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It was fortunate that Wingrove was not within earshot. The speech would have slain him.

'Ah, Marian!' I said appealingly, 'he has not forgotten yours'

'No, I suppose he mentions it with boasting.'

'Say rather with bewailing.'

'Bewailing? Indeed! that he did not succeed in betraying me?'

'Far otherwise—he has been true to you.'

'It is false, sir; you know not, perhaps, that I was myself a witness of his base treachery. Saw him'——

'What you saw was a mere accidental circumstance, nor was it of his seeking. It was the fault of the Chickasaw, I can assure you.'

'Ha! ha! ha! An accidental circumstance,' rejoined she, with a contemptuous laugh: 'truly a rare accident! It was guilt, sir. I saw him with his arms around her—with my own eyes I saw it. What further proof needed I of his perfidy?'

'You saw that, I know; but'——

'More than saw it: I heard of his faithlessness. Did not she herself declare it—in Swampville—elsewhere—boasted of it even to my own sister! More still: another was witness to his vile conduct—had often seen him in her company. Ha! little dreamed he, while dallying in the woods with his red-skinned squaw, that the earth has ears and the trees have tongues. The deceiver did not dream of that!'

'Fair Marian, they are foul calumnies; and whoever has given utterance to them did so to deceive you. Who, may I ask, was that other witness who has so misled you?'

'Oh! it matters not now—another villain like himself—one who—— Oh God! I cannot tell you the horrid history—it is too fearfully black to be believed.'

'Nay tell it me. I half know it already; but there are some points I wish explained—for your sake—for Wingrove's—for the sake of your sister'——

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'My sister! How can it concern her? Surely it does not? Explain your meaning, sir.'

I endeavoured to avoid the look of earnest inquiry that was turned upon me. I was not yet prepared to enter upon the explanation.

'Presently,' I said, 'you shall know all that has transpired since your departure from home; but first tell me of yourself. You have promised me. I ask it not from motives of idle curiosity. I have freely confessed to you my love for your sister. It is that which has brought me here—it is that which impels me to question you.'

'All this is mystery to me,' replied the huntress, with a look of extreme bewilderment. 'Indeed, sir, you appear to know all—more than I—but in regard to myself, I believe you are disinterested, and I shall willingly answer any question you may put to me. Go on! I shall conceal nothing.'

'Thanks!' said I. 'I think I can promise you that you will have no reason to regret your confidence.'

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

PLAYING CONFESSOR.

I was not without suspicion as to the motive of her *complaisance*—in fact I understood it. Despite the declamatory denial she had given to its truth, my defence of Wingrove, I saw, had made an impression upon her. It had no doubt produced pleasant reflections; and rendered myself indirectly an object of gratitude. It was natural that such kindness should be reciprocated.

My own intent in 'confessing' the girl was two-fold. First,

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on Wingrove's account—for notwithstanding all that had been said and done, her love for him *might have passed*. If so, instead of that happy reunion of two loving hearts, which I had anticipated bringing about, I should be the witness of a most painful interview.

Who could read the secrets of a woman's heart? Who trace it through all its eccentric inclinings? A heart, too, like hers—proud and impassible to the ordinary emotions of our nature. It had been rudely chafed. How knew I but that the blow which her love had received had dethroned it forever?

I could not think so: but I was desirous of being certain; and the certainty would be easily obtained.

This, however was but a secondary object. Of more importance was my other purpose—since it bore directly upon the fate of Lilian—the probable peril in which she was placed. It was the strange story of the trapper that was embittering my thoughts. Was the account true? Marian alone could contradict or confirm it.

Without further delay I entered upon the theme. Alas! it was true to the letter.

'And did your father force you to this marriage?'

The answer was given hesitatingly.

'He did.'

'For what reason, do you know?'

'I could never tell—the man had some power over him, but how or in what way, I knew not then, nor do I now. My father told me it was a debt—a large sum which he owed him, and could not pay. I know not whether it was that. *I hope it was.*'

'You think, then, that Stebbins used some such means to force your father's consent?'

'I am sure of it. My father told me as much. He said that by marrying Stebbins I could save him from disgrace; and entreated rather than forced me to it. You know, sir, I could not

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ask why; he was my father. I do think that it was not his wish that I should have that man; but something threatened him.'

'Did your father know it was a false marriage?'

'No, no; I can never think that. I am sure the villain deceived him, as he did me. Oh! father could never have done so! People, I believe, thought him wicked, because he was short with them, and used rough language; but he was not wicked Something had crossed him; and he drank. He was at times unhappy, and perhaps ill-tempered with the world; but never with us. He was always kind to sister and myself—never scolded us. Ah! no, sir, I can never think he knew that.'

'He knew that Stebbins was a Mormon—did he not?'

'I have tried to believe that he did not, though Stebbins afterwards told me so.'

I well knew that he did, but said nothing.

'His saying so,' continued she, 'proves nothing. If father did know of it, I am sure he was ignorant of the wickedness of these people. There were stories about them, but there were others who contradicted these stories, and said they were all scandal—so little does the world know what is true from what is false. I learned afterwards that the very worst that was said was even less than the truth.'

'Of course, *you* knew nothing of his being a Mormon?'

'O sir, how could I? There was nothing said of that. He pretended he was emigrating to Oregon, where a good many had gone. Had I known the truth, I would have drowned myself rather than have gone with him!'

'After all, you would not have obeyed your father's will in the matter, had not something else arisen. At his solicitation you gave your consent: but were you not influenced by the incident that had occurred in the forest glade?'

'I have said I should conceal nothing! On discovering the falsehood of him who had told me he loved me, I was more than

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mad—I was revengeful; I will not deny that I felt spite. I scarcely cared what became of me—else how could I have consented to marry a man for whom I had neither love nor liking! On the contrary, I might almost say I loathed him.'

'And you *loved* the other? Speak the truth, Marian! you have promised to do so—you loved Frank Wingrove?'

'I did.'

A deep-drawn sigh followed the confession.

'Once more speak the truth—you *love him still?*'

'Oh! if he had been true—if he had been true!'

'If true, you could love him still?'

'Yes, yes!' replied she, with an earnestness not to be mistaken.'

Happy Marian! From what perils you have escaped! You have crossed the stormy sea, and know not how near is your haven of perfect bliss. Would that Lilian was alike delivered from danger!

Shall I disclose to her the terrible situation of her sister? Not yet, not yet! Before that cloud comes, let her enjoy one gleam of sunshine.

'Love him, then, Marian! love him still! Frank Wingrove is true!'

I detailed the proofs of his loyalty from beginning to end. I had learned every circumstance from Wingrove himself, and was able to set them forth with all the circumstantiality of truth itself. I spoke with as much earnestness as if I had been suing in my own cause; but I was listened to with willing ears, and my suit was successful. I even succeeded in explaining that *sinister kiss*, that had been the cause of so much misfortune.

To describe the reunion of the lovers is beyond the power of my pen. I could not describe it, for I saw it not. Behind the white tilt it took place, unseen by me, but no doubt to the bewilderment of the wounded 'infantry,' who with open mouth and wondering eyes, lay sheltered under the shadow of the wagon.

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A moment after, I ascended the sloping path to the summit of the butte. My purpose was to see whether the Utahs were yet returning from the pursuit. I first looked back below. The re united lovers were no longer by the mound. They had dismounted, and, side by side, passed onward to the bank of the stream. There stood they, handsome hunter and beautiful huntress—face to face, and bending towards each other in an attitude that betokened the perfect beatitude of both.

CHAPTER LXXXV.

FURTHER REFLECTIONS.

I might without blame have envied them those sweet throbbings of the heart, so different from my own. Widely different, since mine beat with the most painful pulsations.

The cloud which had fallen upon it by the revelations of the Mexican, had been further darkened by the details that confirmed them; and now that the excitement of the conflict was over, and I had an opportunity to reflect upon the future with comparative coolness, the agony of my soul became more concentrated and keen.

I scarcely felt joy that my life was saved. I almost wished that I had perished by the hands of the Indians!

The strange story of the trapper, now fully corroborated by its own heroine—with the additional facts obtained from herself—were only partially the cause of the horrid reflections that now passed before my mind. Indeed, they were enough of themselves to produce emotions sufficiently painful. I could have but one belief about the intentions of Stebbins; and that was, that the base wretch was playing procurer to his despot master, doubtless to serve some ends of self-advancement; for it is well

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known that such are the titles to promotion in the Mormon hierarchy. With the experience of her sister fresh before my mind, I could have no other thought than that Lilian, too, was being led like a lamb to the sacrifice.

And how was this sacrifice to be stayed? How was the sad catastrophe to be hindered?

It was in the endeavour to answer these interrogatories that I felt my feebleness—the utter absence of strength.

Had it been a mere question of overtaking the caravan, there would have been no need for the slightest uneasiness. It would still be many days—weeks, indeed, before the north-going train could arrive at its destination; and if my apprehensions as to the design of Stebbins were well founded, Lilian would be in no danger until after her arrival in the so-called 'Mormon city.' It was there—within the walls of that modern Gomorrah—upon a shrine consecrated to the mockery of every moral sentiment, that the sacrifice of virtue was to be offered up—there it was that the wolf awaited the lamb for his victim-bride!

I knew, if no obstacle should be encountered—such as that which had just delayed us—that we could easily come up to the Mormon emigrants; and we had no longer a similar obstacle to dread. The whole country beyond was Utah territory: and we could count upon these Indians as friends. From that quarter we had nothing to apprehend, and the caravan might be overtaken.

But what then? Even though in company with it, for my purpose I should be as powerless as ever. By what right should I interfere with either the squatter or his child? No doubt, it was their determination to proceed with the Mormons, and to the Mormon city—at least the father's determination This was no longer a matter of doubt; and what could I urge to prevent his carrying it out? I had no argument,—not the colour of a claim—for interference in any way.

Nay, it was more than probable that to the migrating Mor

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mons I should be a most unwelcome apparition—to Stebbins I certainly should, and perhaps to Holt himself. I might expect no very courteous treatment at their hands. With Stebbins for their leader,—and that fact was now ascertained—I might find myself in danger from his *Danites*—of whom no doubt there was a party 'policing' the train.

Such considerations were not to be disregarded. I knew the hostility which, even under ordinary circumstances, these fanatics are accustomed to feel towards outsiders from their sect; but I had also heard of their *display* of it, when in possession of the power. The 'sectary' who sets foot in the city of the Latter-day Saints, or travels with a Mormon train, will be prudent to keep his dissent to himself. Woe to him if he proclaim it too boastingly!

Not only with difficulties, then, but with dangers, was my prospect beset; though the difficulties caused me far more concern than the actual dangers. Had Holt been upon my side—had I been certain of his consent—I should have cared little for the dangers of an *abduction*, the course to which my thoughts now pointed. Even had I been sure that Lilian herself would agree to such a thing, I should have deemed all danger light, and still have entertained a hope of its accomplishment. Alas! the father *would not* consent—the daughter *might not*?

It was the doubt that gave the darkest shade to my reflections.

I continued them, turning the subject over and over—viewing it in every shape and from every side.

Surely Holt would not contribute to the ruin of his daughter—for in no other light did I regard her introduction to the society of the Mormon city. There was manhood in the man—somewhere down near the bottom of his heart—perhaps some remnants of rough virtue? This I had myself proved; and if filial testimony were to be trusted, he was not so abandoned a character as he appeared. Was it possible that he could be aware of the real intentions of the churl who was leading him and his to ruin?

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After all, he *might* not. It is true he must have known that Stebbins was a Mormon; but as Marian had suggested—in her efforts to justify him, poor girl—he might be ignorant of the true character of these sanctified *forbans*. The story that Marian had died on her way out, showed that he had been grossly deceived about that matter. It also gave colour to the idea, that he might be equally the victim of deception about the other. It was in hopes of being able to hold him guiltless that I had so closely questioned Marian—for instinct had already whispered me that in his hands, more than in aught else, rested my hope or my ruin. For that reason had I been so eager to ascertain his inclinings.

That he was under some obligation to the pseudo-apostle was perfectly clear—more than a mere obligation—something that produced a condition of awe; as I had myself been a witness. Some dark secret no doubt was shared between them. But were it ever so dark,—even were it black murder—it might not be on the part of Holt a voluntary endurance; and Marian had hinted at something of this sort. Here—out in the midst of the wild desert, far from justice and from judges—punishment for an old offence might be less dreaded: and a man of the bold stamp of this Tennessee squatter might dream of escaping from the ties of terror in which his spirit had so long been writhing.

Conjectures of this nature were chasing one another through my brain; and not without the effect of once more giving a brighter tinge to the colour of my mental horizon.

I naturally turned my eyes upon Marian. In her I beheld an ally of no ordinary kind—one whose motive for aiding me to rescue her sister could be scarce less powerful than my own

Poor girl! she was still in the enjoyment of those moments of bliss! She knew not the misery that was yet in store for her. Wingrove had my directions to be silent upon that theme—the more easily obeyed in the fullness of his own happiness.

It was no pleasant task to dash from their lips the cup of

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sweet joy; but the time was pressing, and as the sacrifice must come, it might as well be at once.

I saw that the Utahs had given up the pursuit. Most of them had returned to the scene of their short conflict; while others, singly or in squads, were coming on towards the butte. The women, too, were approaching—some with the wounded—some carrying the bodies of the slain warriors—chanting the dismal death-song as they marched solemnly along.

Casting a glance at the wailing multitude, I leaped down from the rock, and rapidly descended to the plain.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

A TRUE TIGRESS.

I WALKED out towards the stream. The lovers met me half way. As I looked in their eyes, illumined and sparkling with the pure light of love, I hesitated in my intent.

'After all,' thought I, 'there will not be time to tell her the whole. The Indians will soon be on the ground. Our presence will be required in the council; and perhaps it will be better to postpone the revelation till that is over. Let her enjoy her new-found happiness for a moment longer.'

I was thus hesitating—at the same time looking the beautiful huntress in the face—when all of a sudden I saw her start, and fling from her the hand she had been hitherto holding in her fond clasp!

The look of her lover—mine as well—was that of bewildered astonishment.

Not so hers. Her cheek turned pale—then red—then paled again; while a glance of proud anger shot forth from her eyes!

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They were turned out upon the plain, back upon Wingrove, and then once more quick and piercing towards the lain.

Merciful heavens! what could it mean?

I faced round in the direction indicated by her glance; I found the explanation.

The chief, Wa-ka-ra, had arrived at the butte; and sat halted upon his war-steed by the side of the wagon. There were three or four other Indians around him, mounted and afoot; but one on horseback was entirely unlike the rest: it was a woman.

She was not bound, yet it was easy to see she was a captive. This could be told by the way she was encircled by the Indians, as well as their treatment of her.

She was on horseback, as already stated, and near to the Utah chief—in front of him.

Neither Wingrove nor I had any difficulty in identifying the captive. It was Su-wa-nee, the Chickasaw.

The eagle eye of jealousy had found her equally easy of identification; more so; since it was by it she was first recognised. It was upon her that Marian was directing those lightning glances. It was she who had caused that convulsive start, and those fearful emotions that now proclaimed themselves in the countenance of the huntress maiden.

The storm soon burst.

'Perjured hypocrite! This is the love you have sworn, with the oath still burning upon your lips? Once more betrayed! O man! Once more betrayed! O God! would that I had left you to your fate!'

'I declar, Marian'——

'Declare nothing more to me! Enough!—yonder is your attraction—yonder! Oh! to think of this outrage! Here, even here to the wild desert has he brought her; she who has been the cause of all my unhappy——Ha! she is coming to you!

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Now, sir, meet her face to face—help her from her horse—wait upon her! Go! villain, go!'

'I swar, Marian, by the livin'——

His speech was interrupted; for at that moment Su-wa-nee, who had shot her horse clear from the *entourage* of her guards, came galloping upon the ground.

I was myself so surprised at this act, that I could not stir from the spot; and not until the Chickasaw had halted directly in front of us, could I believe that I was otherwise than dreaming. Wingrove appeared equally the victim of a bewildered surprise.

As Su-wa-nee drew up, she gave utterance to a shrill scream; and flinging herself from her horse, bounded straight towards Marian, who had turned away at the conclusion of her frantic speech, and was now close to the bank of the stream, with her back towards us.

There was no mistaking the intention of the Chickasaw. The hideous expression of her face, the lurid fire burning in her oblique eyes—the white teeth shining and wolf-like—all betrayed her horrid design, which was further made manifest by a long knife seen glittering in her grasp!

With all my voice I raised a warning shout: Wingrove did the same—so, too, the Utahs who were following their captive.

The shout was heard and heeded. Fortunately it was so; else in another instant warning would have been too late, and the vengeful Chickasaw would have launched herself upon her victim.

Marian turned at the cry; she saw the approaching danger; and with the subtle quickness of that Indian nature common to both, she placed herself in an attitude of defence.

She had no weapon. Her late love-scene needed none. Her rifle had been left by the butte, and she was without arm of any kind; but quick as thought she wound the Mexican *serapé* about

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her arm, and held it to shield her body from the threatened thrust.

The Chickasaw paused as if to make more certain of her blow; and for a moment the two stood face to face, glaring at each other with that look of concentrated rage, which jealousy alone can give. It was the tigress about to spring upon the beautiful panther that has crossed her path.

All this action was well-nigh instantaneous—so quick in its occurrence that neither I nor Wingrove could get up in time to hinder the assailant. We both hurried forward as fast as it was in our power; but we should have been too late, had the thrust been better aimed, or less skilfully avoided.

It was given. With a scream, the Chickasaw shot forward and dealt the stroke; but by a dexterous sleight, the huntress received it on the *scrapé*, and the blade glanced harmlessly aside.

We rushed on to get between them; but at that moment a third combatant had mingled in the fray; and the safety of Marian was secured. It was not the hand of man that had rescued her; but one whom perhaps she deemed more faithful. It was the dog Wolf!

The impetus which the Indian had given to the thrust, and its consequent failure, had carried her past her intended victim. She was turning with the design of renewing the attack, when the dog rushed upon the ground. With a savage growl he sprang forward; and vaulting high into the air, launched himself on the breast of the Chickasaw, at the same instant seizing her by the throat!

In this position he clung, holding on by his terrible teeth, and aided by his paws with which he kept constantly clawing the bosom of the Indian!

It was a painful spectacle: and now that Marian was safe, Wingrove and I ran onward with the intention of releasing the wretched Chickasaw from the grasp of the dog. Before we

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could get near, both victim and avenger disappeared from our sight.

The Indian in her wild terror had been retreating backward. In this way she had reached the bank; and fallen back downward upon the water!

As we arrived upon the edge, neither woman nor dog was visible. Both had sunk to the bottom; but almost on the instant, they reappeared on the surface, the dog uppermost—his teeth still fastened upon the throat of his human victim.

Half-a-dozen men leaped into the water; and after a struggle, the savage animal was dragged from his hold.

It was too late. The sharp incisors had done their dread work; and as the body of the wretched woman was raised over the bank, those who lifted it perceived that the last breath had gone out of it. The limbs were supple, and the pulse no longer beat.

Su-wa-nee had ceased to live!

CHAPTER LXXXVII.

SUSPICIOUS APPEARANCES.

The Indians came crowding around the corpse—both warriors and women. Their exclamations betokened no sympathy. Even the squaws looked on with unpitying aspect—though the victim was of their own race and sex. They knew she had been allied with their enemies; and had been witnesses of her savage assault upon *Maranee*, though ignorant of its motive. Some of them who had lost kindred in the strife, already stirred by grief and fury, were proceeding to insult the lifeless and mutilated remains—to mutilate them still more!

I turned away from the sickening sight. Neither the dear

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nor the living, that composed this ghastly tableau, had further interest for me.

My glance, wandering in search of other forms, first fell upon that of Wingrove. He was standing near, in an attitude that betokened extreme prostration of spirit. His head drooped forward over his breast; but his eyes were not directed to the ground: they were turned upward, gazing after a form that was passing away. It was that of the huntress. She had regained her horse, and was riding off, followed by the dog. She went slowly—as if irresolute both as to the act and the direction. In both, the horse appeared to have his will: the reins rested loosely upon his withers, while his rider seemed wrapped in a silent abstraction.

I was hastening towards my Arab, with the design of joining her, when I saw that I was anticipated. Another had conceived a similar intention. It was Wa-ka-ra.

The young chief, still on horseback, was seen spurring out from the midst of his men, and guiding his war-steed in the direction taken by the huntress. Before I could reach my horse, he had galloped up, and falling into a gentle pace, rode on by her side.

I did not attempt to follow them. However ill-timed the interview, or whatever might be its object, it was not for me to interfere. Even had I risked the rudeness, the policy of doing so would have been doubtful; and it was chiefly this thought that restrained me. Somewhat chagrined at having my designs interrupted, I gave up the intention of mounting my horse, and turned back towards Wingrove.

As soon as I was near enough to read the expression upon his features, I saw that my chagrin was more than shared by him. An emotion of most rancorous bitterness was burning in the breast of the young backwoodsman. His glance was fixed upon the two forms slowly receding across the plain. He was

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regarding every movement of both with that keen concentrated gaze, which jealousy alone can give.

'Nonsense, Wingrove!' said I, reading the thoughts of his heart. 'Don't let that trouble you: there's nothing between them, I can assure you.'

Verily, I was not so confident in offering this assurance. For the Indian, I could not answer. Though he were the coldest of his continent race—as bronze or marble—he could scarcely fail to be stirred by the contemplation of such a companion? There might be nothing on *her* side? and yet, withal, the Utah chief was a splendid specimen of humanity: to all appearance, and by all accounts, noble and chivalric—certainly brave and handsome—with a figure scarcely surpassed by that of Phœbus, and features that, even under the spoiling of the war-paint, proclaimed their elegant outlines. And this maiden of acute perceptions—herself a *sang-mêlée*—of strong passions and powers—might she not have perceived these high qualities? Might she not have looked upon them with predilection? But for the love-scene lately enacted, I should have regarded an affirmative answer to the question as not only possible, but probable Even now, as I looked after the two forms, and noted the bearing of the savage chief, as in close converse he bent gallantly over to the ear of his beautiful *protégée*—while she, on her part, seemed less to droop with despondence—I could almost fancy a relationship between them fatal to the peace of my companion.

But no—no! The scene, I had so lately witnessed between her and Wingrove, was wreathed with acts and expressions of still greater endearment. The fond clasp of the hands—the love-light burning in the eyes of both, plainly mutual and reciprocal—were proofs of a true attachment—one that the veriest coquette could not have shaken off in such hasty fashion. Impossible! The scenes might, and did, present a certain similarity; but both could not be genuine.

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Poor Wingrove! It was not in his power to reason thus—no more than in that of any other circumstanced as he. The lover's heart may be wrung by doubts—even before the echoes of the affirming oath have ceased to vibrate on his ear!

'It's kind o' you, capt'n,' rejoined he; 'but arter all that's passed, I don' know what to think. If she's false arter that, an wi' an Indyen too, by ——, I'd feel like killin' o' her! oh!'

A groan followed the hypothetical threat.

'Come, comrade! calm your passion. There's nothing whatever to justify your suspicions—on *her* side, I am sure of it: she has herself told me so.'

'Sure, capt'n, she kudn't love both o' us?'

I could not help smiling at the question—uttered as it was in a tone of innocent but earnest appeal. I hastily replied in the negative.

'She hes but this minit told me she loved me: said it, an' wud a swore to it, if I hed liked. I war as happy as the flowers o' May: for it war the first time she iver said that wi' her own lips; and jest look now!—look yonder!'

With the shadow deepening more darkly on his brow, he nodded towards those of whom we were speaking. Certainly the spectacle was enough to excite the suspicions of a less jealous lover—if not to justify them. Both the equestrians had halted at a distant part of the plain. They were not so distant but that their attitudes could be told. They still remained on horseback; but the horses were side by side, and so near each other that the bodies of their riders appeared almost touching. The head of the chief was bent forward and downward; while his hand appeared extended from his side, as if grasping that of the huntress!

It was a fearful tableau for a lover to contemplate—even at a distance; and the white lips, clenched teeth, and quick irregular beating of Wingrove's heart—perfectly audible to me as I stood beside him—told with what terrible emotions the picture was inspiring him.

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I was myself puzzled at the attitude of the Utah chief—as well as the silent complaisance with which his attentions appeared to be received.

It certainly had the seeming of gallantry—though I was loath to believe in its reality. In truth I could not give credence to such a thought. It was not human nature—not even woman's—to play false in such *sans façon.*

The appearance must certainly be a deception?

I was endeavouring to conjecture an explanation, when a moving object attracted my attention. It was a horseman who appeared upon the plain, beyond where the huntress and the chief had halted. To our eyes, he was nearly in a line with them—approaching down the valley from the upper cañon—out of which he had evidently issued. He was still at a considerable distance from the other two; but it could be seen that he was coming on at full gallop and straight towards them. In a few moments, he would be up to where they stood.

I watched this horseman with interest. I was in hopes he would keep on his course, and interrupt the scene that was annoying myself, and torturing my companion.

I was not disappointed in the hope. The hurrying horseman kept straight on; and having arrived within a few paces of the ground occupied by the others, he drew his horse to a halt.

At the same instant, the Utah chief was seen to separate from his companion; and riding up to the stranger, appeared to enter into conversation with him.

It had the show of being some matter of interest or secrecy between them: since they remained apart, as if in earnest converse.

After some minutes had elapsed, the chief faced round to the huntress; and apparently giving utterance to some parting speech, headed his horse towards the butte, and along with the stranger, came galloping downward.

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The huntress kept her place; but I saw her dismount and stoop down over the dog, as if caressing him.

I resolved to seize the opportunity of speaking with her alone; and, bidding Wingrove to wait for my return, I once more hastened towards my horse.

Perhaps I should encounter the chief on the way? perhaps he might not exactly like the proceeding? But Marian must be communicated with upon something besides matters of love; and my honest intention rendered me less timid about any idle construction the savage might please to put upon my conduct.

Thus fortified, I leaped to the back of my steed, and hurried off upon my errand.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII.

A FRESH ECLAIRCISSEMENT.

As we rode in counter-directions, I met the chief almost on the instant. I was slightly surprised that he passed without taking notice of me! He could not fail to guess whither I was going, as I was heading straight for the huntress; and there was no other object to have drawn me in that direction. He did not even appear to see me! As he passed at a rapid pace, his eyes were bent forward upon the butte, or turned towards the horseman who galloped by his side. Perhaps the communication which the latter had just made to him was absorbing his thoughts? This might account for his indifference to the movement I was making?

The strange horseman was an Indian. From the absence of the war-costume, I could tell he had not been engaged in the late conflict, but had just arrived from some distant journey—no doubt, a messenger who brought news. His jaded horse and dusty garb justified this conjecture.

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Equally desirous of shunning an encounter, I passed the two horsemen in silence, and kept on my course.

As I drew near to the huntress-maiden, I was speculating on the reception I might expect, and the explanation I ought to give. How would she receive me? Not with much grace, I feared; at all events, not till she should hear what I had to say. The ambiguous and ill-timid appearance of the Chickasaw, combined with the sinister and dramatic incident which followed, must have produced on her mind eccentric and erroneous impressions. The effect would naturally be to falsify, not only the protestations of her lover, but my own testimony borne in his behalf, and indeed all else she had been told. It was not difficult to predict an ungracious reception.

As approached, she gave over caressing the dog, and sprang to the back of her horse. I was in fear that she would ride off and shun me. I knew I could easily overtake her; but a chase of this nature would scarcely have been to my liking. She seized hold of her bridle, and for a moment seemed irresolute; but curiosity as to what I might have to communicate—perhaps some stronger feeling—at length usurped the sway: the rein dropped from her fingers, and in an attitude of listless indifference she awaited my approach.

Even after I had ridden up to her side, she gave neither glance nor gesture of recognition; but, murmuring some words of endearment to the dog, appeared to be alone interested in the movements of the animal!

'Marian Holt!' I said in a tone of gentle remonstrance your suspicions are unjust—I have come to offer you an explanation'——

'I need none,' interrupted she in a quiet voice, but without raising her eyes. A gentle wave of her hand accompanied the words. I thought both the tone and the gesture were repellent; but soon perceived that I was mistaken.

'I need none,' she repeated, 'all has been explained.'

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'Explained! How?' I inquired, taken by surprise at the unexpected declaration.

'Wa-ka-ra has told me all.'

'What!—of Su-wa-nee?'

A gesture of assent was the answer.

'I am glad of this. But Wa-ka-ra! how knew he the circumstances?'

'Partly from the Mexican, to whom your people have communicated them—partly from the captive Arapahoes. Enough—I am satisfied.'

'And you forgive Wingrove!'

'Forgiveness now lies upon his side. I have not only wronged him by my suspicions, but have reviled him I deserve his contempt. *I* can scarcely hope to be forgiven.'

Light had broken upon me—bright light it was for Wingrove! The suspicious *duetto* with the Utah chief was explained. Its innocence was made further manifest, by what came under my eyes at the moment. On the arm that was raised in gesture, I observed a strip of cotton wound round it above the wrist. A spot of blood appeared through the rag.

'Ha! you are wounded!' said I, noticing the bandage.

'It is nothing—merely a scratch made by the point of the knife. Wa-ka-ra has bound it up. It still bleeds a little, but it is nothing.'

It was the *rôle* of the surgeon, then, the chief had been playing when seen in that suspicious attitude! More light for Wingrove.

'What a fiend!' I said, my reflection directed towards Su-wa-nee 'She deserved death!'

'Ah, poor unfortunate wretch! it was a terrible fate; and whether she deserved it or not, I cannot help feeling pity for her. I would to God it had been otherwise; but this faithful companion saw the attempt upon my life; and when any one attacks me, nothing can restrain him. It is not the first time he has

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protected me from an enemy. Ah me! mine has been a life of sad events—at least the last six months of it.'

I soon rescued her from these gloomy reflections. I foresaw the termination of her troubles. Their end was near. Words of cheer were easily spoken. I could promise her the forgiveness of her lover; since I knew how freely and promptly that would be obtained.

'Ah, Marian,' I said, 'a bright future is before you. Would that I could say as much for myself—for your sister Lilian!'

'Ha!' exclaimed she, suddenly excited to an extreme point of interest, 'tell me of my sister—you promised to do so? Surely *she* is not in danger?'

I proceeded to reveal everything—my own history—my first interview with Lilian—my love for her, and the reasons I had for believing it to be returned—the departure from Tennessee with the Mormon—our pursuit of the train, and capture by the Indians—in short, everything that had occurred, up to the hour of my meeting with herself. I added my suspicions as to the sad destiny for which her sister was designed, which my own fears hindered me from concealing.

After giving way to those natural emotions which such a revelation was calculated to excite, the huntress-maiden suddenly resumed that firmness peculiar to her character; and at once entered with me into the consideration of some plan by which her sister might be saved from a fate, which her own experience told her could be no other than infamous.

Yes!' cried she, giving way to a burst of anguish, 'too well know I the design of that perjured villain. O father! lost—dishonoured! Oh sister! bartered—betrayed! Alas! poor Lilian!'

Nay—do not despair!—there is hope yet. But we must not lose time. We must at once depart hence, and continue the pursuit.'

'True—and I shall go with you. You promised to take me to

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my home? Take me now where you will—anywhere that I may assist in saving my sister. Merciful Heaven! She too in the power of that monster of wickedness!'

Wingrove wildly happy—at once forgiving and forgiven—was now called to our council. The faithful Sure-shot was also admitted to the knowledge of everything: for we might stand need of his efficient arm.

We found an opportunity of conferring apart from the Indians—for the *scalp-dance* now engrossed their whole attention; and, withdrawing some distance from the noisy ceremony, we proceeded to discuss the possibility of rescuing Lilian Holt from the grasp of that knave into whose power the innocent girl had so unprotectedly fallen.

CHAPTER LXXXIX.

PLANNING AN ABDUCTION.

Our deliberations occupied but a brief time. I had already considered the subject in all its bearings, and arrived at the conviction that there was only one course to be followed, by which Lilian's safety could be secured—that is, her *abduction* from the Mormon camp.

In this opinion her sister fully agreed. She knew it would be idle to expect that the wolf would willingly yield up his victim; and the painful thought was pressing upon her that even her own father, hoodwinked by the hypocrites that surrounded him, might reject the opportunity of saving his child! He would not be the only parent, who, blinded by this abominable delusion, has so sacrificed upon the unhallowed altar of Mormondom. Of this melancholy fact Marian was not ignorant. Her unhappy

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ourney across the great plains had revealed to her many a strange incident—many a wicked phase of the human heart.

All agreed that Lilian must be taken from the Mormons, either by force or by stealth. It must be done, too, before they could reach the Salt Lake City. Once upon the banks of the Transatlantic Jordan, these pseudo-saints would be safe from the interference of their most powerful enemies. There the deed of abduction would be no longer possible; or, if still possible, *too late.*

Was it practicable elsewhere—upon the route? and how was it to be effected? These were the questions that occupied us.

There were but three men of us: for the Irishman, now completely *hors de combat*, must be left behind. True, the huntress maiden, who had declared her determination to accompany us, might well be counted as a fourth—in all four guns. But what would four guns avail against more than ten times the number? Wingrove had learned from the wretched Chickasaw that there were a hundred men with the Mormon train. It was idle, therefore, to think of an abduction by force. That would have been sheer Quixotism—only to end fatally for all of us.

And was it not equally idle to dream of an abduction by stealth?

Verily, it seemed so. How were we to approach this Mormon host—how enter their camp, guarded as it would be by the jealous vigilance of lynx-eyed villains? By day, it would be impossible; by night, hazardous, and equally impracticable for our purpose. We could not join company with these clannish emigrants without offering some excuse. What pretext could we put forward? Had we been strangers to them, we might have availed ourselves of some plausible story, but unfortunately it was not so. All of us, except Sure-shot, would be known to their leader. My presence, however unexpected, would at once proclaim my purpose to this keen-witted knave; and as for Marian Holt, hers would be a position of positive danger, were

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equalling that in which her sister was now placed. Stebbins could *claim* her—if not by a true husband's right, at least, by the laws of Mormon matrimony; and, of course, by those laws would the case be judged in a Mormon camp—the apostle himself being their interpreter!

The hope which I had built upon the prospect of an alliance with Marian was, that by her intercession, Lilian might be induced voluntarily to make her escape—even, if necessary, *from her father!*

I had conceived the hope too hastily—without dwelling upon the danger to Marian herself. This was now evident to Wingrove and myself. Marian, therefore, could not enter the Mormon camp. We did not dream of submitting her to a danger that might too probably conduct to a double sacrifice—two victims instead of one.

Our thoughts now turned upon the ex-rifleman. He was the only one of us unknown to the leader of the Mormons, and to Holt himself. To Sure-shot our hopes were transferred. He might join the train on some pretext—the rest of us remaining at a distance. By his agency, a communication might be effected with Lilian herself; the proximity of her sister made known; the perils of her own situation—of which, no doubt, the young creature was yet entirely ignorant. Her scruples overcome by a knowledge of her own danger, she would herself aid in contriving a plan of escape?

For such a purpose, Sure-shot was the man, adroit, crafty, courageous.

It may be wondered why in this emergency we had not thought of Wa-ka-ra: sure he could have given us effective aid? With his mounted warriors, he could soon have overtaken the Mormon train, surrounded it, and dealt out the law to its leader.

We knew all this, and *did* think of Wa-ka-ra. We thought of appealing to him, and had not yet given up the design. But we had already learnt the improbability of our appeal being

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acted upon. Marian had interpreted to us the views of the Utah chief in relation to the Mormons. These wily diplomatists had, from their first settlement in the Utah territory, courted the alliance of Wa-ka-ra and his band. They had made much of the warlike chief—had won his confidence and friendship—and at that hour the closest intimacy existed between him and the Mormon prophets. For this reason, Marian believed it would require a stronger motive than mere personal friendship, to make him act as their enemy.

'Perhaps,' thought I, 'in this he *may* have a stronger motive Or has the Utah chief so long contemplated his fair *protégée* only with the eye of *friendship*? If so, his heart must be colder than the snow shining on yonder summit!

I gave not utterance to these thoughts. The last hypothesis was partially true. The first and second as I afterwards learned, were erroneous. Fortunate for Frank Wingrove that they were so?

In such an important enterprise no chance should be left untried. I was determined none should be; and therefore incited Marian to make the appeal to the Utah chief. She consented.

It was worth the experiment. Should the answer prove favourable, our difficulties would soon disappear, and we might hope for a speedy success If otherwise, our prospects would still be the same—no worse: for worse they could scarcely be.

Marian left us, and proceeded on her errant to the chief. We saw him withdraw from the ceremonies, and, going apart engaged with her in what appeared an earnest and animated conversation. With hopeful hearts, we looked on. Wingrove was no longer jealous. I had cured him with a hint; and the bandaged arm of his betrothed had explained the delicate attentions which the Indian had been seen to bestow on her.

The dialogue lasted for ten minutes—the speakers at intervals glancing towards us; but we knew the theme, and patiently awaited the issue.

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It was soon to be declared to us. We saw the chief wave his hand—as a signal that the conversation was ended; and the speakers parted. Wa-ka-ra walked back among his warriors, while Marian was seen returning towards us.

We scrutinised her countenance as she approached, endeavouring to read in it what our wishes dictated—an affirmative to our appeal. Her step was buoyant, and her glance, if not gay, at least not one that betokened disappointment. We were unable to determine, however, until her words declared the answer of the chief.

As Marian had anticipated, he could not consent to act openly against the Mormons; but the tale had enlisted his sympathy; and he had even suggested a plan by which we might carry out our design without his interference. It was this; the horseman that had just arrived was a messenger from the Mormons. Unable to find the Coochetopa Pass, they were still encamped in the great valley of San Luis, on the banks of the Rio del Norte. The only one of them who had been across the plains before was their leader—Stebbins of course—and he, having gone by the Cherokee trail and Bridger's Pass, was entirely unacquainted with the route they were now following. They were in need of a guide; and having encountered the Indian at this crisis, and learned that he belonged to the band of Wa-ka-ra—not far off, as the man informed them—they had despatched him to the Utah chief, with a request that the latter would furnish them with a guide, and two or three of his best hunters.

Before Marian had ended her explanation, I had divined the scheme. We were to personate the guide and hunters. That was the suggestion of the Utah chief.

It was perfectly feasible. Nothing can be easier than to counterfeit the semblance of the American Indian. The colour of the skin is of no consequence. Ochre, charcoal, and vermilion make red man and white man as like as need be; and for the hair, the black tail of a horse, half covered and confined by the

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great plumed bonnet, with its crest dropping backward, is a disguise not to be detected. The proud savage doffs his eagle plumes to no living man; and even the most intrusive Mormon would not dare to scrutinise too closely the *coiffure* of a Utah Indian.

The plan was rendered further practicable by a new and able ally enlistening himself into our ranks. This was the brave trapper, 'Peg Leg,' who, from a hint given him by the Utah chief, volunteered to act as the guide. The Mexican had already conceived an instinctive antipathy towards the Mormon 'hereticos;' and we might rely upon his fidelity to our cause. The scheme exactly suited the eccentric character of this singular man; and he entered upon his duties *con amore* and at once.

By his assistance, we soon procured the required costumes and pigments; but neither were to be 'put on' in the presence of the Utahs. It was necessary that their chief should not be compromised by a too conspicuous 'intervention.'

The friendly chief had hinted a further promise to Marian—even an open interference in our favour, should that become necessary. He would follow close after the Mormon train; and should our design prove a failure, might then *use his influence* in our behalf.

This would have been the best news of all. With such a prospect, we should have had little to fear for the result: but, alas! before leaving the ground, an incident occurred that threatened to prevent the Utah chief from fulfilling that promise, however formally he might have made it.

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CHAPTER XC.

PROTECTOR AND PROTÉGÉE.

The incident referred to was the arrival of a scout, who, after the conflict, had followed upon the trail of the Arapahoes. This man brought the intelligence that the scattered enemy had again collected—that, while fleeing from the *rout*, they had met with a large war-party of their own tribe, accompanied by another of their allies, the Cheyennes; that both together formed a band of several hundred warriors, and that they were now marching towards the valley of the Huerfano, to take revenge for the defeat which the Red-Hand had sustained.

This unexpected news brought the scalp-dance to an abrupt termination, and changed the whole aspect of the scene. The women, with loud cries, rushed towards their horses, with the intention of betaking themselves to a place of security, while the warriors looked to their arms, determined to make stand against the approaching foe.

It was not expected that the enemy would make their attack at once; certainly not before night, and perhaps not for days. The preparations to receive them were therefore entered upon with all the coolness and deliberation that attack or defence might require.

The encounter eventually came off; but it was only afterwards that I learned the result. The Utahs were again victorious. Wa-ka-ra in this affair gave another proof of his strategic talent. He had made stand by the butte, but with only half of his warriors, distributed in such a manner as to appear like the whole

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band. These, with their rifles, could easily defend the mound against the arrows of the enemy; and did so, during an assault that lasted for several hours. Meanwhile, the other half of his band had been posted upon the bluffs, hidden among the cedars, and, descending in the night, they had stolen unexpectedly upon the allied forces, and attacked them in the rear. A concert sortie from the mound had produced complete confusion in the ranks of their enemies; and the Utahs not only obtained a victory, but 'hair' sufficient to keep them scalp-dancing for a month.

As I have said, it was afterwards that these facts came to my knowledge. I have here introduced them to show that we could no longer depend on any contingent intervention on the part of the Utah chief, and we were therefore the more keenly conscious that we should have to rely upon our own resources.

The Utahs showed no wish to detain us. They felt confident in their own strength, and in the fire-weapons—which they well knew how to use—and, after thanking their friendly chief for the great service he had rendered us, and confiding our wounded comrade to his care, we parted from him without further ceremony.

I witnessed not his parting with Marian. Between them there was an interview, but of what nature I could not tell. The huntress had stayed behind; and the rest having ridden forward, no one of us was present at that parting scene. There may have been a promise that they should meet again: for that was expected by all of us; but whether there was, or what may have been the feelings of the Indian at parting with his pale-face *protégée*, I was not to know.

It was difficult to believe that the young chief could have looked so long on that face, so beautifully fair, without conceiving a passion for its possessor. It was equally difficult to believe, that if this passion existed, he would have thus surrendered her to the arms of another! An act so disinterested would have proved him noble indeed—the Rolla of the North!

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If the passion really did exist, I knew there could be no reciprocity. As Marian galloped up, and gazed in the eyes of the handsome hunter—now entirely her own—her ardent glance told, that Wingrove was the proud possessor of that magnificent maiden.

In volunteering to be one of our party, Marian was submitting herself to a fearful risk. That of the rest of us was trifling in comparison. In reality, we risked nothing, further than the failure of our plans; and a certain punishment, if taken in the act of abduction. But even for this the Saints would scarcely demand our lives—unless in hot blood we should be slain upon the instant

Her position was entirely different. The Mormon apostle, whether false husband or real, could and would claim her. There was no law in that land—at all events, no power—to hinder *him* from acting as he should please; and it was easy to foresee what would be his apostolic pleasure. The very presence of Wingrove would stimulate him to a terrible revenge; and should her Indian disguise be detected, Marian might look forward to a fate—already deemed by her worse than death.

She was sensible of all this; but it did not turn her from her determination. Her tender affection for Lilian—her earnest desire to save her sister from the peril too plainly impending, rendered her reckless about her own; and the bold girl had formed the resolution to dare everything—trusting to chance and her own strong will, for the successful accomplishment of her purpose.

From that purpose I no longer attempted to dissuade her. How could I? Without her aid, my own efforts might prove idle and fruitless. Lilian might not listen to *me*? Perhaps that secret influence, on which I had so confidently calculated, might exist only in a diminished degree? Perhaps it might be gone for ever? Strange to say, though I had drawn some sweet inferences from those neglected flowers, every time the *bouquet* came back to my memory, it produced a palpable feeling of pain! He who se

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cunningly sued, might hope for some measure of success? And she, so sweetly solicited—more dangerous than if boldly beset—had her heart withstood the sapping of such a crafty besieger? *My* influence might indeed be gone; or if a remnant of it still existed, it might not turn the scale against that of her father—that fearful father! What should he care for one child, who had already abetted another to her shame?

Possessed by these thoughts, then, I tried not to turn Marian from her purpose. On the contrary, I now rather encouraged it. On her influence with Lilian I had now placed my chief reliance. Without that I should have been almost deprived of hope.

It might turn out that Lilian no longer loved me. Time, or absence, may have inverted the *stylus* upon the tender page of her young heart; and some other image may have become impressed upon its yielding tablet? If so, my own would sorely grieve; but even if so, I would not that hers should be corrupted. She must not be the victim of a villain, if my hand could hinder it.

'No, Lilian? though loved and lost, I shall not add to the bitterness of your betrayal. My cup of grief will be bitter enough without mingling in it the gall of revenge.'

CHAPTER XCI.

ASSUMING THE DISGUISE.

We again rode for the upper cañon of the Huerfano, keeping along the bank of the stream. Ten miles further on, we came to the forking of two trails—the more southern one leading up the Cuchada to the pass of Sangre de Cristo. By it had the gold-seekers gone in company with the dragoons—the latter *en route* for the new military post of Fort Massachusetts; the for

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mer no doubt intending to take the line of the Gila or Mohave to their still distant destination—the gold-bearing placers of California.

Above its upper cañon, the Huerfano bends suddenly to the north; and up its banks lies the route to Robideau's Pass—the same taken by the Mormon train.

We had no difficulty in following their trail. The wheel and hoof tracks had cut out a conspicuous road, and the numbers of both showed that the party was a large one—much larger than our previous information had led us to anticipate. This was of little consequence, since in any case we could not have used force in the accomplishment of our design. I regarded it rather as a favourable circumstance. The greater the multitude, the less likelihood of an individual being closely observed or speedily missed.

We reached Robideau's Pass as the sun was sinking over the great plain of San Luis. Within the pass we came upon the ground of the Mormon encampment. It had been their halting-place of the night before. The wolves prowled among the smouldering fires, whose half-burnt fagots still sent up their wreaths of filmy smoke.

We now knew the history of the captured wagon and slain teamsters. Our guide had learned it from the Utah messenger. It had belonged to the Mormons, who, at the time the Arapahoes made their attack, were only a short distance in the advance. Instead of returning to the rescue of their unfortunate comrades, their dread of the Indians had caused them to yield ready obedience to the Napoleonic motto, *sauve qui peut;* and they had hurried onward, without making a stop, till night overtook them in the Robideau Pass.

This version enabled me to explain what had appeared to me rather strange conduct on the part of the escort. The character of the victims to the Arapahoe attack would in some measure account for the indifference of the dragoons. With the safety

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of the Mormons they had no concern; and would be likely enough to leave them to their fate. But the guide had ascertained that both gold-diggers and dragoons—disgusted with their saintly *compagnons du voyage*—had separated from them, and having gone far ahead, in all probability knew nothing of the sanguinary scene that had been enacted in the valley of the Huerfano.

We resolved to pass the night on the ground of the deserted encampment. By our guide's information—received from the runner—the Mormons were about thirty miles in advance of us. They were encamped on the banks of the Rio del Norte, there awaiting the answer of the Utah chief. That we should ourselves deliver on the following day.

Having given the *coyotés* their *congé*, we proceeded to pitch our buffalo-tents. A brace of these, borrowed from the friendly Utahs, formed part of the packing of our mules. One was intended for the use of the huntress maiden; the other, to give lodgment to the rest of our party. Not but that all of us—even Marian herself—could have dispensed with such a shelter. We had another object in thus providing ourselves. It might be necessary to travel some days in the company of the Saints: in that case, the tents would serve not only for shelter, but as a place of concealment. The opaque covering of skins would protect us from the too scrutinizing gaze of our fellow-travellers; and in all likelihood we—the hunters of the party—should stand in need of such privacy to readjust our disguises, disarranged in the chase. Under cover of the tents, we could renew our toilette without the danger of being intruded upon. Chiefly for this reason, then, had we encumbered ourselves with the skin lodges.

As yet, we had not assumed our Indian disguise. The opening scene of the travestie was reserved for the morning.

* * * * * * * * *

At daybreak it commenced; Peg-leg acting as principal *costumier*. The Taos trapper needed no disguise. Unknown to the

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Mormons, they would have no suspicions about him; and he could act as their guide in his Mexican costume. This left him free to give his services to the rest of us, and assist in our heraldic emblazonment.

My own features, sufficiently pronounced, rendered it all the more easy to make an Indian of me; and a uniform coat of vermilion over my neck, face, and hands, transformed me into a somewhat formidable warrior. The buckskin hunting tunic, leggings, and moccasins, concealed the remainder of my skin; and the horse's tail, craftily united to my own dark tresses, with the plumed bonnet and drooping crest over all, completed a costume that would have done me credit at a Parisian *bal-masqué*.

With equal facility was accomplished the metamorphosis of the young backwoodsman; but not so easily that of Sure-shot. The *nez retroussé*, thin yellow hair, and green-grey eyes, appeared to be insurmountable obstacles to the Indianising of the ex-rifleman. Peg-leg, however, proved an artist of skill. The *clevelum* of Sure-shot, well saturated with charcoal paste, assumed a different hue. A black circle around each eye neutralised the tint of both iris and pupil. To his face was given a ground-coat of red ochre; while some half-dozen dark stripes, painted longitudinally over it, and running parallel to the nose, extinguished the snub—transforming the Yankee into as good an Indian as any upon the ground!

Marian was her own 'dresser;' and while we were engaged outside, was making her toilet within the tent. Her costume would require but little alteration; it was Indian already. Her face alone needed masking; and how was that to be done?

To speak the truth, I was apprehensive upon the score of her disguise. I could not help dwelling on the fearful fate that awaited her, should the counterfeit be detected, and the girl identified. All along, I had felt uneasy about this; and had been endeavouring to devise some scheme by which to avoid the imprudence of her presenting herself in the Mormon camp. But

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the thought of Lilian—the perilous situation in which she was placed—perhaps more than all, the selfishness of my own love had hindered me from thinking of any definite alternative.

When I saw the huntress maiden issue forth from her tent, her face empurpled with the juice of the *allegria* berries—her cheeks exhibiting, each a circle of red spots—while a line of similar marking extended across her forehead, I no longer felt fear for the result. Though the hideous tattooing could not hide the charms of her speaking countenance, it had so changed its expression, that even Wingrove himself would not have recognised her! More like was it to baffle the scrutiny of father and false husband.

We were now all dressed for the drama; and, after making a *cache* of our cast-off garments, we struck tents, and moved forward to the performance.

The faithful Wolf accompanied us. It was against my wish, and contrary to the counsel of our guide; but Marian would not part with a companion that more than once had protected her from cruel enemies.

The dog had been disguised, as the rest of us. Shorn of his shaggy coat, with his tail trimmed smooth as that of a greyhound—his skin, moreover, stained Indian fashion—there was but slight chance that the animal would be recognised.

CHAPTER XCII.

THE MORMON TRAIN.

A few hours' ride brought us to the western end of the pass; when rounding a spur of the mountain, a wide plain was suddenly displayed to our view.

'*Mira!*' exclaimed the Mexican, '*el campamento de los Judios!*' (Behold the encampment of the Jews!)

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The guide halted as he spoke. The rest of us followed his example—as we did so, gazing in the direction to which he pointed.

The plain that stretched before us was the grand *valle* of San Luis; but presenting none of those characteristics which we usually associate with the word 'valley.' On the contrary, its surface was perfectly level—having all the aspect of a sleeping sea; and with the white filmy haze suspended over it, it might easily have been mistaken for an expanse of ocean water.

At first sight it appeared to be bounded only by the horizon; but a keen eye could perceive its western rim—in the dim outlines of the Sierra San Juan, backed by the brighter summits of the 'Silver' Mountains (*Sierra de la Plata*). More conspicuous on the north were the wooded slopes of the Sierras Mojada and Sawateh; while right and left towered the snow-covered peaks of Pike and the Watoyah, like giant sentinels guarding the approach to this fair mountain-girt valley.

These details were taken in at a single *coup d'œil*, and in the same glance the eye was caught by the sheen of real water, that, like a glittering cord, sinuously extended through the centre of the plain. Under the dancing sunbeams, it appeared in motion; and curving repeatedly over the bosom of the level land, it resembled some grand serpent of sparkling coruscations, that had just issued from the mysterious mountains of the 'Silver Sierra,' and was slowly and gently gliding on towards the distant sea.

From the elevation on which we stood, we could trace its tortuous windings almost to the distant Sierra of San Juan; and in the concavity of one of these—almost upon the verge of our vision—we beheld 'el campamento de los Judios'

Unprepared for it, we should never have thought of taking what we saw for an encampment of Mormons, or men of any kind. Under the white, filmy veil that floated over the plain, some half-dozen little spots of a more intensified white were barely visible. These the Mexican pronounced to be 'los carros' (the wagons).

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I had recovered my pocket-glass, and this was now called into requisition. A glance through it enabled me to confirm the trapper's statement. The white spots were wagon-covers: they could be none other than the tilts of the Mormon train.

I could make out only some half-dozen of them; but there were others behind these. They were clumped, or, more likely, *corralled* upon the plain. This, indeed, was evident from their arrangement. Those seen were set in a regular row, with their sides towards us, forming, no doubt, one quarter of the 'corral.'

I looked for living forms. These were also visible under the glass—men and animals. Of the latter, a large drove of different kinds and colours could be seen, mottling the plain at some distance from the wagons. The men were moving about the vehicles; women I could also distinguish by their dresses; but the distance was too great for me to note the occupations of either sex—even by the aid of the magnifying lens. Lilliputians they looked, both men and women; while the horses and cattle might have been mistaken for a pack of curs.

It mattered not to us to know their occupation, nor even what they might be doing when we should arrive upon the ground. We had no intention of stealing upon them. Confident in our complete *déguisement*, we intended to ride boldly forward—if need be, into the very middle of their camp.

It was now the hour of noon, and we halted to bivouac. Although the distance that separated us from the Mormon camp was still considerable, we were in no hurry to advance. We had formed the resolution not to join company with the Saints until near sunset. We knew that there would be curious eyes upon us; and in the hour of twilight we should be less exposed to their scrutiny. True, we might have joined them in the night, and passed off our counterfeit semblance with still greater security. But the morning would bring fresh light, with curiosity unsatisfied, and that would be more disadvantageous.

Half an hour of observation, and the novelty of our arrival

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would wear off. For this the half hour twilight would be the best time. No doubt, they had met many parties of friendly Indians while crossing the great plains? There had been some among their travelling companions. They would scarce consider us a curiosity?

We had another reason for reaching their encampment before nightfall: we wanted a few minutes of light to take the bearings of the *corral*, and get acquainted with the *topography* of the surrounding plain. Who could tell what chance might turn up in our favour? An opportunity might occur that very night—as likely as afterwards, and perhaps under more favourable circumstances. We had no desire to enter upon our engagement as guide and hunters. We should be too willing to abandon the *rôle*, even before beginning it. * * * * * *

The last rays of the setting sun were sparkling on the selenite of the Silver Mountains, as we approached the encampment of the Saints. We were now near enough to make out the dimensions of the caravan. There were about a score of the large tilted wagons (Troy and Conestoga), with several smaller vehicles (Dearborns and Jerseys). The latter, with springs, were no doubt the more luxurious travelling carriages of such Saints as may have been in easier circumstances at home; while the ox-drawn 'Conestogas' belonged to the common crowd. With the larger wagons, a 'corral' had been formed, as is the usual custom of the prairie caravan.

In the following fashion is the enclosure constructed:—The two front wagons are drawn side by side, and halted close together. The two that follow next on the trail, are driven up outside of these—until their front wheels respectively touch the hind ones of the pair that precede them—when they also stop. The pair following in their turn double their poles upon these and so on, till half the train is expended. The enclosure is not yet complete. It forms only a half-circle, or rather semi-ellipse; and the corresponding half is obtained by a slight change in the

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mode of bringing up the remaining vehicles. These are driven forward to the ground, so that the rear of each is turned *inward*—the reverse of what was observed in bringing the others into place—and the double curve which before was constantly diverging, now becomes convergent. When all the wagons have got into their places, the ellipse will be completed; but it is customary to leave an *open* space at the end—a sort of avenue by which the enclosure may be entered. When horses and cattle require to be *corralled*, this entrance can be closed, by simply stretching a rope across it. If danger be apprehended, the travellers keep within this enclosure—the bodies of the wagons forming an excellent rampart of defence. The tilts serve as tents; and under their capacious covering the female members of the emigrant's family are accustomed to sleep in comfort and security. Sentinels outside, and horse-guards picketed still further off, give warning of the approach of an enemy.

As we drew near the Mormon camp, we could perceive that in this approved fashion had they constructed their *corral*. Most of the lighter vehicles were inside the enclosure; and there we could see the forms of women and children moving about in an excited manner, as if they had retreated thither on discovering our approach.

The men still remained outside, and the horses and horned cattle had been left undisturbed. Our party was not large enough to create an alarm—even had our arrival been unexpected. It could scarcely have been so. No doubt they took us for what we were: the emissaries of the Utah chief!

When within a few hundred yards of the camp, a party, already on horseback, came trotting towards us. Archilete had hoisted a piece of white fawn skin on his gun-rod—the world-known symbol of peace and so understood by the red men of America. A towel, or table-cloth, or something of the sort, was held up in answer; and after that the mounted Mormons spurred forward to meet us.

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When we were within a dozen lengths of each other, both parties reined up; and the Mexican and Mormon leader, separating from their respective followers, approached one another, shook hands, and entered into conversation.

What they said was simple enough. I could hear the trapper declaring in broken English the nature of our errand—that he had been sent by Wa-ka-ra to act as their guide; and that we, his *compañeros*, were Utah hunters, to provide game for the caravan.

Of the Mormons who rode up to us there were half a dozen in all; and I was fain to hope they were not a fair specimen of the emigrant party.

They were not—as I afterwards ascertained: they were the *Danites*, or *Destroying Angels*; that accompanied the train. 'Destroying *devils*' would have been a more appropriate appellation: for six more villainous-looking individuals I had never beheld. There was no sign of the angelic, neither in their eyes nor features—not a trace; but on the contrary, each might have passed for an impersonation of the opposite character—a very 'devil incarnate!'

Five of them I had never seen before—at least to remember them. The sixth only on one occasion; but him I remembered well.

The man who had once looked in the face of the ex-attorney's clerk, and *ci-devant* schoolmaster of Swampville, was not likely soon to cast that countenance from his remembrance. It was Stebbins who was talking to the Mexican.

The dialogue was of brief duration. The tale told by the trapper was scarcely news; it had been expected; and was therefore accepted without suspicion.

The interview ended by Stebbins pointing to a place where we might pitch our tents—outside the wagon enclosure, and near the bank of the river.

This was just what we desired; and proceeding direct to the spot, we commenced unpacking our paraphernalia.

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CHAPTER XCIII.

THE CORRALLED CAMP.

As soon as our quality was known, the Saints came crowding around us. The corral poured forth its contents—until nine-tenths of the whole caravan, men, women, and children, stood gazing upon us with that stare of idiotic wonder peculiar to the humbler classes of countries called civilised.

We managed to withstand the ordeal of their gaze with an assumed air of true savage indifference. Not without an effort, however; since it was difficult to resist laughing at the grotesque exclamations and speeches which our appearance and movements elicited from these wondering yokels.

We were cautious not to notice their remarks, as if we understood them not. Peg-leg, by the aid of his Anglo-American jargon—picked up among the 'mountain-men'—was able to satisfy them with an occasional reply. The rest of us said nothing; but, apparently in earnest occupation with our affairs, turned our eyes on them only by stealth.

I could perceive that Marian was the chief attraction; and for a moment my apprehensions were sufficiently keen. She had done nothing to disguise her sex—the mask extending no further than her face and features. Her neck, hands and wrists—all of her skin that might be exposed—were stained Indian, of course; and there would have been little likelihood of their discovering the false epidermis under a casual observation. Had it been a mere ordinary person—painted as she was—she might have passed for an Indian without difficulty. As it was, however, her

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voluptuous beauty had tempted a closer scrutiny : and spite of her disfigured face, I saw glances directed upon her, expressive of secret but passionate observation.

Some of the bystanders took no pains to conceal their predilection.

'Darnationed likely squaw !' remarked one. 'Who air she old timber-toes ?' inquired he, addressing himself to the guide.

'Squaw—Utah gal,' replied the Mexican in his trapper patois. Pointing to me, he continued : 'She sister to hunter-chief—she hunter too—kill bighorn, buffalo, deer. *Carrambo !* *Si !* She grand *cazadora.*'

'Oh ! durn your kezadora. I don' know what that ere means. but I do know, and rayther calculate if that ere squaw had the scrubbin'-brush an a little soft soap over that face o' hern, she'd look some punkins, I guess.'

The fellow who had thus eloquently delivered himself was one of the six who had saluted us on our arrival. Two or three of his *confrères* were standing beside him—gazing with lynx, or rather wolf-like glances upon the girl. Stebbins himself, before parting, had cast upon her a look of singular expression. It was not significant of recognition ; but rather of some thought of viler origin.

The others continued to give utterance to their mock admiration ; and I was glad, as the girl herself appeared to be, when the tent was pitched, and she was able to retire out of reach of their rude ribaldry.

We had now an opportunity of studying the Mormons *chez eux-mêmes*—for not one of them had the slightest idea that their talk was understood by us. Most of them appeared to be of the humbler class of emigrants—farm people, or those of mechanical calling—artisans of the common trades—shoemakers, blacksmiths, joiners, and the like. In the countenances of these there was no cast that betrayed a character either of particular saintliness or sin. In most of them, the expression was simply stolid and

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bovine; and it was evident that these were the mere cattle of the herd.

Among them could be observed a sprinkling of a different sort of Saints—men of more seeming intelligence, but with less moral inclinings—men of corrupt thoughts and corrupt lives—perhaps once gentle, but now fallen—who had adopted this pseudo-religion in the expectation of bettering their temporal rather than spiritual condition.

The influence of these last over the others was quite apparent. They were evidently chiefs—bishops or deacons—'tenths' or 'seventies.' It was singular enough to see *dandies* among them; and yet, however ludicrous the exhibition, dandyism was there displayed! More than one 'swell' strutted through the crowd in patent-leather boots, Parisian silk hat, and coat of shining broad-cloth. The temporary halt had offered an opportunity for this display of personal adornment; and these butterflies had availed themselves of the advantage, to cast for a few hours the chrysalis of their travelling gear!

The women were of all ages; and, it might be added of all nations. Several European tongues mingled in the mêlée of sounds; but the one which predominated was that language without vowels—the jargon of the Welsh Principality.

The continual clacking of this unspeakable tongue told that the sons and daughters of the Cymri mustered strongest in the migration. Many of the latter wore their picturesque native costume, the red hooded cloak kirtle; and some were unspeakably fair, with the fine white teeth, fair complexion, and ruddy cheeks, common to other branches of the Celtic race, but nowhere so characteristic as among the fair maidens of Cambria. It was, no doubt, those sweet shining faces, wreathed with free artless smiles, that had caused the lady-killers to unpack their portmanteaus.

My own eyes dwelt not upon these. Ever since our arrival upon the ground, I had been watching with keen glances the

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opening that led into the corral. Every one who came forth—man or woman—had been the object of my scrutiny.

But my glances had been given in vain; and were not rewarded by the recognition of a single individual. The entrance was about two hundred yards from the place where our tents were being pitched; but even at that distance I should have recognised the colossal squatter. As for Lilian, my heart's instinct would have declared her identity at the most casual glance.

Neither father nor daughter had yet made their appearance outside the enclosure; though all the world besides had come freely forth, and many were going back again!

It was strange, to say the least, they should act so differently from the others. She, I knew, was very different from the 'ruck' that surrounded her; and yet one would have thought that curiosity would have tempted her forth—that simple child-like inclination, natural in one so young, to witness our wild attire—to gaze on our plumes and our paint?

I could less wonder at Holt himself being insensible to such attraction; but in her it seemed strange.

My astonishment increased, as form after form passed out from the opening, but not that for which my eyes were searching. It ceased to be astonishment; it grew into chagrin; and after that assumed the character of an apprehension.

This apprehension I had already entertained, but in a less definite form. It now shaped itself into a cruel doubt—the doubt of *her being there*—either inside the corral, or anywhere in the Mormon camp!

After all, had we taken the wrong track? Might not Holt have kept on with the gold-diggers? The story of the Chickasaw signified nothing. Might not Lilian, under the protection of that gallant dragoon with the torn tassel—might not she?——

'It is quite probable,' I muttered to myself, 'highly probable that they are not here! The squatter may have resisted the

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will of his Apostolic companion; and, separating himself from the Mormon party, have gone with the diggers? No! yonder! Holt himself, as I live!

The exclamatory phrases were called forth by the appearance of a man in the opening between the wagons. He was standing still; and must have reached the spot he occupied but the moment before—when my eyes for an instant had been turned away. The Herculean frame, and great rufous beard hanging over his breast, proclaimed to my eyes the identity of the Tennessean squatter; and the costume confirmed it. It was precisely the same worn by him on that eventful morning—when standing before me with his long rifle raised against my life. The ample surtout of greenish blanket-cloth, a little further faded—the red shirt underneath—the coarse horse-skin boots rising to his thighs—the crimson kerchief turbaned around his head, its loose flap falling down over his shaggy eyebrows—were all identical with the portrait remaining in my memory.

I watched him with eager eye. Was it his intention to step nearer and examine us? or had he come forth upon some other business?

He was looking grave, and sad, I thought; but in the distance I could scarce note the expression upon his countenance. It did not appear to betoken curiosity. Once only he glanced towards us, and then turned his eyes in an opposite direction. This did not show that he cared much for our presence, or was in any wise interested in it. In all likelihood, he shared not the childish curiosity of his travelling companions—to whom he in other respects bore but little resemblance. As he stood in their midst, he looked like some grim but majestic lion, surrounded by curs or jackals. His behaviour suggested a further similitude to the great forest monarch. He seemed to hold no converse with those around him; but stood apart, and for the moment motionless as a statue. Once only I noticed that he yawned; stretching out his colossal arms, as if to aid in the involuntary

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action. For this purpose, and this alone, did he appear to have come forth; since, shortly after its accomplishment, he turned back into the avenue, and disappeared behind the barricade of the wagons!

CHAPTER XCIV.

BEAUTY EMBROWNED.

The apparition—for it had something of the character of one—restored my equanimity. Holt was with the Mormon train; and of course Lilian was there.

It may seem strange that this knowledge should have given me satisfaction—that a belief but yesterday grieving me should to-day bring gladness! The apparent anomaly is easily explained. It was the consequence of a change in the situation. My confidence in the success of our scheme had now become strengthened—almost to a certainty. So deftly had we taken our measures that we need apprehend no great difficulty in attaining the end aimed at. Among the Saints there was not the slightest suspicion of our character—at least none had yet shown itself. We should be free to come and go as we pleased: since the very nature of our contract required it. Camp and caravan would be alike accessible to us—at all hours, I might say—and surely opportunities would not be lacking for the accomplishment of our purpose.

Only one obstacle was worth regarding—the will of Lilian herself. She might still refuse to become a runaway. She might not consent to forsake her father. In that case, our efforts would be idle indeed!

Had I reason to expect such a perverse contingency? Surely not? Though my own influence might be gone, her sister would

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still have the power to persuade her. Her eyes once opened to the conspiracy that threatened her, but one thought could arise in that virtuous bosom—how to escape from it.

'No—no,' was my concluding reflection, spoken in soliloquy, 'there need be no fear of opposition in that quarter. True, Lilian is still a child; but her virtue is that of a virgin heart. Her sister's story, when told to her, will arouse her to a sense of her own danger. She will be ready, as we, to adopt measures for averting it.'

Drawing comfort from this reflection, I was turning to attend to my horse. The gallant creature had been sadly neglected of late, and needed my care. A huge Mexican *silla*, that with its trappings half covered his body, would have sufficiently disguised him; but I had not much fear of his being recognised. Stebbins and Holt had both seen him—once only, and then under such circumstances that it was scarcely possible they could have noticed him. Otherwise, they might have remembered him readily enough. Such a noble steed once seen, was not easily forgotten.

I had no fear, however; and was about to remove the saddle, when an object presented itself to my eyes that interrupted my intention, causing me to remain fixed and immobile. In the open ground, scarcely twenty paces from where I stood, was a form that fell upon the eye like a beam of empyrean light in the midst of deepest darkness—a girl of golden roseate hue, with a *chevelure* of yellow hair hanging to her haunches in all its lustrous luxuriance!

Scarce twenty paces separated me from Lilian Holt, for need I say that it was Lilian herself who was standing before me?

Instinctively, I noted changes. The wax-like smoothness, and, to a certain extent, the whiteness of her complexion, had yielded to the fervid rays of the prairie sun; but the slight embrowning appeared rather an improvement: as the bloom upon the peach, or the russet on the nectarine, proves the superior

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richness of the fruit. It had toned down the red upon her cheeks, but the glow was still sufficiently vivid.

I observed another change—in her stature. She had grown larger and taller—in both respects, almost equalling her sister, and resembling the latter in that full development of form, which was one of the characteristic features of her queen-like beauty.

These were the only changes external. Even the simple costume—the old homespun frock of yellowish stripe—still enveloped her form; no longer hanging loosely as of yore, but presenting a more sparing fit on account of the increased dimensions of the wearer. The string of pearls, too—false pearls, poor thing!—yet encircled her throat, whose now fuller outline was more capable of displaying them.

A pleasing reflection crossed my mind at the moment, that shaped itself into an interrogatory: might there have been no motive for further adornment?

As erst, her little feet were naked, gleaming with roseate translucence against the green back-ground of the herbage.

She was standing when I first saw her: not in a position of rest, but with one foot pressing the turf, the other slightly retired, as if she had just paused in her steps. She was not fronting towards me, but half turned. She appeared to have come as near as she intended, and was about going off again in an oblique direction; like the startled antelope, that, despite its timidity, stops to gaze upon the object that has alarmed it!

So short a time had my eyes been averted from the path by which she must have approached, I might well have fancied that she had suddenly sprung out of the earth—as Cytherea from the sea! Equally brilliant was the apparition—to me, of far more absorbing interest.

Her large eyes were fixed upon me in a gaze of wondering curiosity—a curiosity which the picturesque habiliments and savage character of my toilet were well calculated to provoke.

Her examination of me was soon ended; and she walked off

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in the direction towards which she had already turned her face She seemed scarcely satisfied, however; as I observed that she looked repeatedly back. What thought was prompting her to this? Women have keen perceptions—an intuition almost equalling instinct in its perceptive power. Could she have a suspicion? No, no: the thing was improbable—impossible!

The path she was following would conduct her to the bank of the river—about a hundred yards above where our tents had been pitched, and a like distance from the nearest of the wagons. Her object in going thither was evident. A tin water-can, hanging by its iron handle over her wrist, proclaimed her errand.

On reaching the river, she did not proceed to fill the vessel, but placing it by the water's edge, sat down beside it. The bank, slightly elevated above the stream, offered a sort of projecting bench; and upon this she had seated herself—in such an attitude that her limbs hung over, until one foot was immersed in the water. Her long hair swept back upon the grass behind her; and with her head drooping forward, she appeared to gaze into the crystal depths of the stream—as intently, as if mirrored there she saw the form which her thoughts most delighted to dwell upon.

Up to this point, I had watched her every movement; but only by stealth and in silence; for I knew that eyes were upon me. Just then, however, most of the gazers had retired from our tents—a call to supper within the corral having summoned them away. For all that, I dared not go up to the girl. The act would have appeared strange: and even she might desire to shun the too *free* intrusion of my savage presence: perhaps flee from it altogether?

The opportunity of speaking with her was sufficiently tempting. Such another might not soon recur? I trembled at the thought of losing it What was to be done?

I might have sent Marian? She was still inside her tent—

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where she had taken shelter from the bold glances of her vulgar admirers. She did not yet know that Lilian was outside. I might have given her notice of the circumstance, and deputed her to speak with her sister; but I had certain reasons for not following this course.

At this crisis, an idea occurred to me that promised to aid me in obtaining the interview I longed for. My Arab had not yet been given to the grass!

Near where Lilian was seated, the herbage was luxuriant—more so than anywhere around. Upon it I could picket my steed, or hold him in hand, while he should browse?

I lost not a minute in removing the saddle, and adjusting the halter; and scarcely another in approaching the spot where the young girl was seated. I drew near, however, with due caution—fearful that by a too brusque approach I might hasten her departure.

I gave my horse to the grass, now and then guiding him with a short pull upon the halter, which I still held in my hand.

The young girl saw that I was gradually nearing her; and looked twice or three times towards me—not, as I fancied, with any air of alarm. Rather of interest, I thought; but this may have been only a fancy. My horse appeared to share it—indeed more than share it: since she fixed her eyes upon him frequently, and looked longer at him each time! Was it the noble form that was attracting her admiration? or was there something that called up a recollection? *She* might remember the horse!

'Oh! Lilian! would that I could speak to you as myself! How my heart yearns to give, and receive the token of recognition!'

But no—not yet. I would not declare myself, till assured that that recognition might be welcome. Not till I could learn, whether the tender ties that bound our hearts was still unloosed—whether its too slender thread was yet unbroken! I had resolved to explore the secret chambers of her heart; and this it was that

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rendered me desirous of anticipating any interview that might occur with her sister. Perhaps too easily might I obtain the knowledge of which I was in search? I might reach, only to rue it?

As I drew near, my hopes of being permitted to speak with her increased. She still kept her seat, and made no attempt to shun me.

I had approached within speaking distance. Words were upon my tongue; when a harsh voice, coming from behind, interrupted, at the same instant, both my speech and my attention.

CHAPTER XCV.

THE YELLOW DUENNA.

'Good lor, gal! wha' you doin' down da? You know Mass' Holt an' Mass' Stebbins want dar coffee? Wy aint you done fotch de water?'

I faced round on hearing the voice. The tone and patois had already admonished me that the speaker was neither white nor Indian; but of that third typical race that mingles in the social life of the trans-atlantic world—an African. The harsh accentuation had prepared me for the appearance of a man and a negro. I was mistaken both as to the sex and colour. In the speaker I beheld a *mulatto*—a yellow woman—of large size, gross, corpulent, and greasy. Her dress was a light-coloured muslin print, negligently open at the breast, and garnished with gaudy ribbons, from which freely protruded the mountainous masses of her bosom On her head was a *toque* of checked 'bandana,' folded over the black corkscrew ringlets scarcely hanging so low as her ears; while

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ungartered stockings upon her ankles, and slipshod shoes upon her feet, completed the *tout ensemble* of her costume.

Notwithstanding the *négligé* visible in her apparel, there were signs of conceit as to personal appearance. The fashion and trimmings were not in keeping with that of her tabooed race; and in the set of the toque there was a certain air of coquetry. The features, small and regular, might have once passed for handsome: but they were now nearly eliminated by her obese condition, which produced a disproportionate rotundity of face.

The eyes moreover, had lost all loveliness, if they had ever had such an expression. Their glance, in its brightest day, could have been only animal. It was still sufficiently sensual; but of a sullen and leering character.

The voice of this woman had already produced an unpleasant effect upon me; so, too, the words spoken. The sight of her as she stood 'akimbo'—her hands resting upon her enormous haunches—only strengthened the sinister impression, which was still further confirmed by my observing a similar effect elsewhere—on the countenance of Lilian! Even over that radiant surface I could see that a cloud had stolen, and still continued to shadow it!

'Say, gal! wha you doin' dar, anyhow? You fill dat pail double quick, or, golly, you catch it!'

A threat! Lilian listens to it, and obeys!

'I am coming, Aunt Lucy,' she replied in a trembling voice, at the same time hastening to fill the water-can.

I was in hopes that this conciliatory answer would send the mulatto back into the corral. To my chagrin, it produced a result directly the reverse; for on hearing it, the woman came waddling down in rapid strides toward the river.

She made direct for the spot where Lilian was filling the can: and by her quick, nervous gestures, and the lurid light flashing in her half-buried eyes, I could perceive that some hideous passion had been stirred within her.

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Lilian had already perceived that she was approaching, and stood to wait for her—evidently in awe!

When within a few paces of the girl, the fat fury opened upon her in a tone as vindictive as the sound of her voice was harsh and grating.

'Wha for, gal, you call me *Aunt* Lucy? Wha for you sa dat? Dam! you call me so 'gain, I job you' eyes out. Sure I live, I gouge you!'

The monster, as she spoke, stretched out her hand, bending the thumb with a significant gesture. She continued in the same spiteful tone:

'I tear you' har you so conceit 'bout—you golding har folks call—piff! da colour ob yella squash—I pull um out o' you' head in fistfull, you call me *Aunt* Lucy 'gain.'

'I did not know it would offend you,' replied the young girl in a meek voice. 'Do not the others call you by that name?' she inquired hesitatingly. 'Mr. Stebbins does so.'

'Nebba you mind what Mass' Stebbins he do: da's my affair. You hab a care you no call me so. Da's my affair, too. Jes you say *Aunt* Lucy 'gain, I soon spoil you' beauty, buckra gal.'

'I shall not do so again, Lucy,' timidly rejoined the young girl.

'*Miss* Lucy, you please. Don't you tink you still in Tennessee? You' know better bye'n and bye. Yella woman out yeer good as white—marry white man all same—all same 'mong da Mormons—yah, yah, yah!'

A leer towards Lilian accompanied this laughter, rendering its hideous significance more palpably expressive.

So provoked was I by the brutal behaviour of the yellow wench, I could scarcely restrain myself from rushing up and kicking her over the bank upon which she was standing. Nothing but the stern necessity of preserving my incognito hindered me from treating her as she deserved; and even then it cost me an effort to keep my place. I could see that the

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young girl cowered beneath the threats of this bold bawdrii, who had in some way gained an ascendency over her—perhaps appointed by Stebbins to act in the double capacity of spy and guardian?

Notwithstanding the horrid imaginings to which this woman's presence had given rise, I succeeded in smothering my wrath, and remaining silent. My good star was guiding me; and soon after I was rewarded for the act of prudence.

'Say!' continued the mulatto, still addressing herself to Lilian, 'wha for you sittin' dar; are gazin' down on da water? S'pose you tink you sees him shadda dar? Yah, yah, yah!'

'Whose shadow?' innocently inquired the girl.

I trembled while listening for the reply.

'O Lordy! you berry innocent gal, make appear! S'pose I no see you write him name in dat ere book you got? S'pose I no see you make him letter in de sand, wha we camp on Arkansaw? You scratch him name ebberywha; you got him on de big box inside Mass' Stebbins wagon. Ha! you better no let Mass' Stebbins see um dar!'

I would at that instant have given my horse for a glance at either box or book. But in another moment the necessity was gone; and the revelation, though made by polluted lips, was not the less welcome to my ears. What cared I whether the oracle was profane, so long as its response echoed my most earnest desires?

'S'pose nobody read but youseff?' continued the mulatto in the same jeering tone. 'S'pose nobody know what E. W. stand for? yah, yah! S'pose dat ere don't mean Edwa'd Wa'ffeld? eh, missy yella har?'

The young girl made no reply; but the crimson disc became more widely suffused over her cheek. With joy I beheld its blushing extension.

'Yah, yah, yah!' continued her tormentor, 'you may see um shadda in da water—dat all you see ob Edwa'd Wa'ffeld

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Whoebber dat ere coon be, you nebba set you eyes on him 'gain —nebba !'

A dark shade quickly overcast the crimson, betokening that the words gave pain. My pleasure was in like proportion, but inversely.

'So, missy golden har ! you' better gone 'long wi' de young dragoon officer who want take you—dat am, if you must hab man all to youself. Yah, yah, yah ! Nebba mind, gal ! you get husband yet. Mass' Stebbins he find you husban'—he got one for you a'ready—waitin' dar in de Mormon city ; you soon see ! husban' got fifty odder wife ! Yah, yah, yah !'

Words appeared upon the lips of Lilian—low murmured and but half uttered. I understood them not. They appeared not to be a reply to the speeches that had been addressed to her, but rather the involuntary accompaniment to an expression of peculiar anguish, that at that moment revealed itself on her features.

The mulatto did not seem either to expect or care for an answer ; for on giving utterance to the fiendish insinuation, she turned upon her slippered heels, and hobbled back towards the camp.

I held my face averted, as she was passing near where I stood. I feared that she might be attracted to stop and examine me ; and I had a motive for wishing her to keep on. Her curiosity did not appear to be very excitable. Such as it was, it evolved itself in a comic fashion—as I could tell by the coarse 'Yah, yah, yah !' that broke from her as she passed me. I could tell, too, by the receding of the sound, that she had gone on without stopping.

Lilian followed at a distance of about ten paces. Her body was bent to one side by the weight of the water-can ; while her long golden hair, tossed in confusion over the straining arm, almost swept the sward by her feet. The toilsome attitude only displayed in greater perfection the splendid development of the

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feminine form, which death alone could now hinder me from call ing my own.

I had already planned my course of action. I only waited for an opportunity to carry it out. No longer desired I to hide recognition from her. The barrier that had hitherto restrained me from giving sign or word—and that would still have continued to do so—had now been removed—happily as unexpectedly In my heart, now filled and thrilling with joy, there was no mo tive for further concealment; and I resolved at once to declare myself. Not openly, however: not by speech, nor yet by gesture. Either might have provoked an exclamation; and have drawn upon us prying eyes that were observing at no great distance.

As stated, I had already shaped out my course; and for a minute or more had been waiting for the very opportunity that now seemed to offer.

During the conversation above detailed, I had not been an inactive listener. I had taken from my pocket a scrap of paper and pencilled upon it three simple words. I knew the paper on which I was writing; it was the half leaf of a letter well remembered. The letter itself was not there; it was within the folds of my pocketbook; but there was writing on the fly-leaf, and on both faces of it.

On one side were those cherished verses, whose sweet, simple strain, still vibrating upon the chords of my heart, I cannot help repeating:

I think of thee, when Morning springs
  From sleep with plumage bathed in dew,
And like a young bird lifts her wings
  Of gladness on the welkin blue.
And when at Noon the breath of love
  O'er flower and stream is wandering free,
And sent in music from the grove,
  I think of thee—I think of thee!

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I think of thee, when soft and wide
  The Evening spreads her robe of light·
And like a young and timid bride,
  Sits blushing in the arms of Night.
And when the moon's sweet crescent springs
  In light o'er heaven's deep waveless sea;
And stars are forth like blessed things,
  I think of thee—I think of thee!

O sir! it is very, very true! I do think of you; and I am sure I shall do so as long as I live! LILIAN HOLT.

On the reverse side of the page I had penned, or rather pencilled, a response: not then, but in an idle hour by the way, with the presentiment that it might sometime reach the hands of her forwhom it was intended. In those hands I was now determined to place it—leaving the issue to the cipher itself.

The answer ran thus:

TO LILIAN.

As music sweet, thy gentle lay
  Hath found its echo in my heart;
At morn, at eve, by night, by day,
  'Tis never from my thoughts apart;
I hear the strain in every breeze
  That blows o'er flower, and leaf, and tree;
Low murmuring, the birds and bees
  All seem to sing—I think of thee!

Perhaps, of me no more a thought
  Lingers within thy bosom blessed:
For time and absence both are fraught
  With danger to the lover's rest.
O Lilian! if thy gentlest breath
  Should whisper that sad truth to me,
My heart would soon be cold in death—
  Though dying still 'twould think of thee!

EDWARD WARFIELD,
The Indian Hunter.

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The words at the moment added were those appended to my own name, which I had introduced to aid in the recognition.

However inappropriate might be the scheme for making myself known, I had no time to conceive any other. The interruption caused by the mulatto had hindered me from a verbal declaration, which otherwise I might have made; and there was no longer an opportunity for the periphrasis of speech. Even a word might betray me.

Under this apprehension, I resolved to remain silent; and watch for the occasion, when I might effect the secret conveyance of the paper.

As the young girl drew near, I stepped towards her—pointing to my lips, and making sign that I wished to drink The action did not alarm her. On the contrary, she stopped; and, smiling kindly on the thirsty savage, offered the can—raising it with both hands before her.

I took the vessel in mine, holding the little billet conspicuous between my stained fingers. Conspicuous only to her: for from all other eyes the can concealed it—even from those of the bizarre *duenna*, who had faced round, and was still standing near. Not a word escaped me. I only nodded towards the paper, as I raised the pail to my lips and pretended to drink.

Ah! that weird instinct of a woman's heart—a woman who loves! How pleasant to watch its subtle play, when we know that it is exerted in our favor!

I saw not the action, nor yet the emotion that may have been depicted on that radiant face. My eyes were averted. I dared not trust them to watch the effect. I only knew that the pail was taken from my hands—the paper along with it! and like a dream, the fair water-carrier passed from before me, leaving me alone upon the spot!

My eyes followed the receding form, now side by side with her chiding guardian. Together they entered the corral, Lilian upon the nearer side; but as the maiden's face disappeared be

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behind the sombre shadow of the wagon, a glance thrown back through those shining tresses convinced me that my scheme had succeeded!

CHAPTER XCVI.

A SISTER'S APPEAL.

I HASTENED to inform Marian of what had passed; having returned to the tents without giving any sign of the excitement that was stirring in my breast.

Why not to night? why not at once? within the hour? These were my reflections put interrogatively.

The huntress still remained within her tent; but enjoying the fraternal privilege, I could enter; and stooping I crept under the covering of skins.

'You have seen her!' she said affirmatively, as I entered.

'I have.'

'And spoken with her?'

'No- I dared not trust myself to speak. I have given her a token of recognition.'

'In writing? I saw you. She knows, then, that you are here?'

'By this time she should—that is, if she has found an opportunity to look at the paper.'

'She will find that, I daresay. Oh! she *is* beautiful—very beautiful. I do not wonder, sir, that you love her! Were I a man—— Knows she that I am here?'

'Not yet. I feared to tell her, even in writing. I feared that in the sudden transport of joy which such a discovery would produce, she might proclaim it to your father—perhaps to *him*?'

'You are right—there might have been that risk. She must

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not know it, till we can caution her against declaring it. How do you propose to act?'

'I came to take counsel from you. If we could only make known to her that you are here, she might find an opportunity of coming forth; and in the darkness, all the rest could be accomplished. Even to-night—why not this very night?'

'Why not?' echoed the girl, catching eagerly at the hope. 'The sooner the better. But how am I to see her—should I enter their camp? Perhaps'——

'If you would write to her, I'——

'*Would*, stranger, say *could*. Writing is not one of my accomplishments. My father cared little to teach me—my mother still less—she cared not at all. Alas! I cannot even write my own name!'

'It matters not: dictate to me. I have here paper and pencil; and shall write for you. If she has read the other, she will be on the look-out—and no doubt you may find an opportunity of giving a note to her.'

'And she of reading it, no doubt. Yes; it does seem the best course we can take—the surest and safest. Surely Lilian has not forgotten me? Surely she will follow the advice of a sister who dearly loves her?'

Drawing out my pencil, and tearing a leaf from the memorandum-book, I stood ready to act as amanuensis. The intelligent though unlettered maiden resting her forehead upon her hand—as if to aid in giving shape to her thoughts—commenced the dictation:

'Beloved sister!—A friend writes for me—one whom you know. It is Marian who speaks—your own sister Marian—still living and well. I am here with others—in the disguise of Indians—those you have seen. We are here on your account alone. We have come to save you from a danger—O sister! a dreadful danger, which your innocent heart cannot dream of!'

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I was not so certain of this. The shade I had observed upon Lilian's countenance, produced by the taunting speeches of the mulatto, had convinced me that the young girl was not without some presentiment of her danger, however vaguely outlined. So much the better for our purpose; and, as I had already declared my belief to Marian, I did not interrupt her. She continued:

'When you have read this, do not show it to any one; do not tell its contents even to'——

The maiden paused for a moment. Filial affection, too cruelly crushed, caused her voice to falter. Tremblingly and low-muttered came the words:

'Our father!

'Dear Lil!' she proceeded in a firmer tone, 'you know how dearly I loved you? I love you still the same. You know I would have risked my life to save yours. I now risk that, and more—ah! far more, if I could tell you; but sometime you shall know all. And you, dear Lil! your danger is even greater than of life—for it is the danger of dishonour!

'Hear me, then, beloved sister, and do not refuse to follow my advice! When it is dark—and to-night if possible—steal out from the camp. Separate yourself from the vile people who surround you—separate yourself—O sister! it is hard to say the word—from him, our father—him who should have been our protector, but who, I fear—— Alas! I cannot speak the thought.

'To-night, dear Lil! if possible, to-night! To-morrow it may be too late. Our disguise may be discovered and all our plans frustrated. To-night—to-night! Fear not! your friend awaits you—your old favourite, Frank Wingrove, with other brave companions. Your sister will receive you with open arms.

'MARIAN.'

Surely Lilian would not resist such an appeal? Surely it would be sufficient to separate her—even from him whose slight protection scarcely gave him claim to the sacred title of parent!

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Our next anxiety was as to how the note might be delivered We thought of Archilete; and in the end he might be employed to convey it to her for whom it was intended; but just at that moment the Mexican was absent. In the performance of his *métier* as guide, he had entered the corral, and was engaged with the chief men of the caravan—giving them such counsel as might enable them to pursue their route, and no doubt concealing those points that might be prejudicial to our purpose. I had no reason to doubt the fidelity of the man. It is true his betrayal of us would have been fatal; though it might afterwards have brought himself to punishment. But it never occurred to me to question his loyalty. His sentiment of hostility for the Mormon 'hereticos' had been freely and repeatedly expressed; and I reposed perfect confidence in the honesty of his declarations.

On discovering the absence of Archilete, the idea had occurred to me, that it might not be necessary to await his return to the tents. Time was too valuable to be wasted. Already had the sun sunk to rest over the grand desert of the Colorado; and the sombre shadows of the Sierra San Juan were projected far into the plain—almost to the edge of the encampment. In these latitudes, the soft eve lingers but a few moments; and night was already spreading her dusky mantle over the plain The white tilts of the wagons glimmered paler through the gray light; and the red glare of the camp-fires, burning within the corral, now shone upon the canvas, disputing the power to illumine it, with the last touches of the twilight. Another minute—scarcely another minute—and the day would be done.

'Come!' I said to my companion, 'we may go together. The guide has proclaimed us sister and brother—prophetic words, I hope. Believing in that relationship, they will not see anything extraordinary in our taking a stroll together. *Outside* the camp. we may find the opportunity we are in search of?'

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Marian offered no objection; and issuing together from the tent, we walked off in the direction of the corralled wagons.

CHAPTER XCVII.

A CARAVAN BALL.

As if to favour our design, the night descended dusk as the wing of a vulture. The summits of San Juan were no longer visible—their outlines becoming blended with the dark background of sky; while the more sombre slopes of the Sierra Mojada had long since faded from the view.

Even light-coloured objects could be but dimly traced through the profound obscurity; the white covers of the wagons, our own weather-bleached buffalo tents, the metallic sheen of the stream, and the speckled oxen browsing along its banks. Between these objects the atmosphere was filled with a uniform and amorphous darkness; and dusky forms like ours could be seen only under the light of the blazing fires. A few of these had been kindled outside the enclosure—near the avenue entrance; but most were inside, surrounded by groups of emigrants, the flames casting their ruddy light upon the bright, cheerful faces of women and children, or on the ruder forms and more care-worn countenances of the men.

Underneath the wagon-bodies, the red light, broken by the radiating spokes of the wheels, gleamed outward in a thousand jets; and men walking outside, flung gigantic shadows over the plain Nearer to the line of barricade, only the shadows of their limbs were projected, the upper part of their persons being shrouded from the glare by the tilts and boxing of the wagons. Under this friendly cover we were enabled to approach close up to the vehicles, without much risk of attracting observation

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But few persons were straying outside—only the cattle guard and other routine officers of the caravan, all equally negligent of their duties. They knew they were in Utah territory, and had no enemy to fear.

't was moreover the hour of most interest in the daily routine of a travelling train—when forms cluster around the bivouac fire and bright faces shine cheerfully in the blaze—when the song succeeds the supper—the tale is told, and the merry laugh rings on the air—when the pipe sends up its aromatic wreaths of blue curling smoke, and sturdy limbs, already rested from the toils of the day, feel an impulse to spring upward on the 'light fantastic toe.'

On that eve, such an impulse had inspired the limbs of the Mormon emigrants. Scarcely had the *débris* of the supper been removed, ere a space was cleared midway between the blazing fires; music swelled upon the air—the sounds of fiddle, horn, and clarionet—and half a score of couples—setting themselves *en quadrille*—commenced treading time to the tune.

Sufficiently *bizarre* was the exhibition—a dance of the true 'broad-horn' breed; but we had no thought of criticising an entertainment so opportune to our purpose. The swelling sound of the instruments drowning low conversation, the confusion of many voices, the attraction of the saltatory performance, were all circumstances that had suddenly and unexpectedly arisen in our favour. My companion and I had no longer a fear that our movements would be noted. Indeed only those who might be in the wagons, and looking through the draw-string aperture in the rear of the tilts, would be likely to see us at all. But most of these apertures were closed—some with curtains of common canvas, others with an old counterpane, a blanket, or such rag as was fitted for the service. We saw no face looking outwards; all were turned upon the attractive circle of Terpsichoreans, that under the brilliant light of the fires, were bounding through the mazy figures of the dance

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The wagons forming the sides of the enclosure were in *échelon* and lapping their tilts on each other, it was impossible to see between them. With the two, however, that closed the end of the *corral* the case was different. These had been drawn up side by side, and parallel to each other; and though their wheels touched there still remained a space above the tires, through which we could command a view of the ground within the enclosure. At this point, we had placed ourselves.

It was the very vantage-ground we desired. We could view the enclosed ellipse longitudinally, and note nearly every movement made by those inside. Even should we be detected in our espionage, it would pass without suspicion as to our real object. What more natural than that we should desire to witness the spectacle of the dance? The act would be construed as springing from mere curiosity?

Our eyes, wandering over the different figures, soon became fixed upon two. They were men, and seated—near each other, and some paces apart from the crowd of dancers. They were Holt and Stebbins. Both were by the side of a large fire, that threw its red light in full glare over them—so that not only their figures, but even the expression upon their features we could distinctly trace. The squatter, pipe in mouth, and with head drooping between his knees, looked grimly into the fire. He was paying no attention to what was passing around him. His thoughts were not there?

Stebbins, on the other hand, appeared eagerly to watch the dancers. He was dressed with a degree of adornment; and exhibited a certain patronizing attitude, as if master of the sports and ceremonies! Men and women went and came, as if paying court to him; and each was held for a moment in courtly converse, and then graciously dismissed, with all the ludicrous etiquette of mock ceremonial!

I looked among the dancers, scrutinising each figure as it came round to the light. There were girls and women—some

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of all ages. Even the gross *mulatto* was 'on the floor,' hobbling through the figures of a quadrille. But Lilian? I was disappointed in not seeing her—a disappointment that gratified me.

Where was she? Among the spectators?

I made a hurried examination of the circle. There were faces fair and young—white teeth, and rose-hued cheeks, but not hers. She was not among them!

I turned to her sister to make a conjectural inquiry. I saw that the eyes of Marian were upon her father. She was regarding him with a fixed expression. I could fancy that some strange reflection was passing through her mind—some wild emotion swelling within her bosom. I refrained from interrupting the current of her thoughts.

Up to this time, the wagon beside which I stood had been dark inside. Suddenly, as if by magic, a light flashed within, gleaming through the translucent canvas. A candle had been lighted under the tilt; and continued to burn steadily.

I could not resist the temptation to look in. Perhaps a presentiment guided me? It needed no disarrangement of the cover—only to step a pace to one side, and opposite the canvas curtain in the rear of the wagon. The slight rude hanging had been negligently closed. An interstice left open between the two flaps permitted a full view of the interior.

A number of large boxes and articles of household use filled up the bed of the wagon; and over these were strewed some coarse garments, and pieces of bed-clothing—blankets, counterpanes, and a bolster or two. Near the forward end, a chest of large dimensions stood higher than the rest; and upon the lid of this a piece of tallow-candle was burning in the neck of an old bottle. Between the flame of the candle and my eyes a figure intervened, shadowing the rearward part of the wagon. It was a female figure; and dim as was the light, I could trace the outlines of a lovely *silhouette* that could be no other than that of Lilian Holt. A slight turn of the head brought the gleam of

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golden hair under the flickering flame; and the features were seen *en profile*. They were hers. It was Lilian who occupied the wagon.

She was alone; though in front of the vehicle, I could see forms not distant from where she sat. Young men were hanging about. Ardent glances were directed towards her. She appeared desirous of shunning them!

She held in her hands a book. One might have fancied she was reading it: for it was open; but the light fell sparingly on the page; and her stealthy glances towards it, told that something besides the book was occupying her attention. A piece of detached paper that gleamed whiter between the leaves, was evidently the object of her solicitude. It was the writing upon that she was trying to decipher.

I watched with eager eye. I noted every movement of the fair reader. Marian had joined me. We both watched together.

It required an effort to restrain ourselves from speech. A word would have been worth all this writing; but a word might also have ruined everything. They who stood in front of the wagon might have heard it. It was not spoken.

Lilian was evidently watching these people. Perhaps the restraint thus placed upon her hindered any violent show of emotions which the writing on the paper may have called forth? A short suppressed sigh as she finished reading; a quick searching glance among the groups in front—another, shot stealthily towards the rear of the wagon—this was all in her manner that might have appeared unusual.

I watched till her eyes were again turned rearward; and then, gently parting the canvas flaps, I held Marian's note between my fingers inside the curtain. The apparition of my red hand did not cause an alarm. The poem had paved the way for the more prosaic epistle; and neither scream nor start was occasioned by its delivery. As soon as I saw that the piece of paper

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was observed, I dropped it among the boxes, and withdrew my hand.

The fear that we might have been noticed, standing too long in one place, influenced us to move away. If fortune should favour the reading of that note, on our return we might find our scheme still riper for execution.

CHAPTER XCVIII.

TO HORSE AND AWAY.

Our absence was of short duration—a turn to the tents and back again. I had spoken a word to Wingrove and Sure-Shot. Archilete was still absent. I had merely warned my comrades not to picket our horses at too great a distance from the tents: as we knew not how soon we might need them. I had little thought, as I delivered this cautionary counsel, that within the hour—nay, almost within that minute, we should be hurrying to mount and begone! . Our idea had been that sometime about midnight—perhaps later, when the camp should be buried in sleep—Lilian, already warned that we were in wait for her, would steal forth, and join us at the tents. Thence, trusting to the speed of our horses, we should find no difficulty in escaping—even though pursuit might be given on the instant of our departure. We were all well mounted—as well at least as the Mormons could be—and with a guide who knew the passes, we should have the advantage of them.

It did not occur to Marian or myself, that that very moment might have been more propitious for our flight, than the hour of midnight, or any other. Then, in the midst of their noisy revelry, when eyes were turned upon the dance, and souls absorbed in the giddy whirl of pleasure—when slight sounds were un

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noticed amidst the swelling music and the clangour of many voices—when even the hoof-stroke of a gallopping horse would have fallen unheard or unheeded—then indeed would have been the very time for our designed abduction!

The idea did not occur to either of us. I cannot tell why it did not; unless it was that we were hindered from thinking of final measures, by our uncertainty as to the *disposition* of Lilian. Her consent was now the most important condition to our success—as her refusal would be its grandest obstacle. Surely she would *not* refuse? We could not for a moment harbour the apprehension.

By this time she must have read the letter. We could now safely speak face to face with her—that is, if opportunity should be found for an interview. To seek that opportunity was our present purpose in returning to the wagons.

The candle was yet burning within the tilt. Its flame feebly illuminated the canvas.

We drew near with stealthy tread—watching that we were not observed. We stood once more by the end of the huge vehicle.

We were raising our eyes to look through the curtain, when at that instant the candle went out. Some one had suddenly extinguished it!

One might have regarded this as an ill omen; but the moment after we could hear a slight rustling sound, as if a person moved under the cover of the wagon, passing along towards its hinder part. We stood silent, listening to the sound.

It ceased at length; but immediately after, the edge of the curtain was raised slowly, and without noise. A face appeared in the opening! There was scarcely any light; but even through the grim darkness that lovely face gleamed soft and white. Marian stood nearest, and easily recognised it. In a tender tone she pronounced the magic word: 'Sister!'

'O Marian? Sister! is it you?'

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Yes, dearest Lil! But hush! speak low!'

'Are you alive? or am I dreaming?'

'No dream, sister, but a reality.'

'O mercy! tell me, dear sister'——

'All—all—but not now—there is no time.'

'But *he*, sister? who is he that is with you?'

I stepped near enough to reply in a whisper:

'One, Lilian, who *thinks of thee!*'

'O sir! Edward!—Edward!—it is you!'

'Hush!' whispered Marian, again interposing with a quick gesture of caution. 'Speak only in whispers! Lilian!' continued she in a firm tone, 'you must fly with us!'

'From our father? Do you mean that, Marian?'

'From our father—ay, even from him!'

'O dear sister! what will he say? what will he do if I forsake him?—O my poor father!'

There was anguish in the tones of her voice, that told of filial affection still strong and true, however much it may have been trampled upon.

'Say and do?' replied Marian. 'He will rejoice—*should* rejoice—when he knows the danger from which you have escaped. O sister! dear sister! believe me—believe your own Marian! A fearful fate is before you. Flight with us can alone save you. Even father will soon be powerless to protect you, *as he was to protect me.* Do not hesitate then, but say you will go with us? Once beyond the reach of those villians who surround you, all will be well.'

'And our father, Marian?'

'No harm will come to him. It is not his ruin they seek but yours, sister, yours!'

A choking sigh was all the reply I could hear. It appeared to be a signal that the spell was broken: as if the heart had escaped from some thraldom in which it had been held. Had the words of Marian produced conviction? or had they but

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confirmed some apprehension previously conceived? Was it the snapping of the filial thread I had heard in that anguished expression?

Both the sigh and the silence that followed seemed to signify assent. To make more sure, I was about to add the influence of my intervention, with all the fervency of a lover's appeal. Wild words were upon my lips; when at that moment some strange interjections reached my ears, uttered within the enclosure. I stepped suddenly to one side, and looked over the wheels of the wagons. I beheld a spectacle that caused the blood to rush through my veins in quick quivering current. Marian saw it at the same time.

Holt had been seated near the fire, when seen but the moment before; but as we now looked through, we saw that he had risen to his feet, and was standing in an attitude that betrayed some strange excitement! It was from him the interjections had proceeded.

The cause was easily explained. The dog Wolf was leaping up against his legs—uttering low growls of recognition, and making other demonstrations of joy. The animal had recognised its old master!

Despite the stained snout and close-trimmed tonsure—despite both paint and shears—the dog had been identified. Between him and his master the recognition was mutual. I saw this at a glance; and the words of the squatter only confirmed what was already evident to the eye.

'Durn it, ef 'taint my ole dog!' cried he, after several shorter exclamations—'my ole dog Wolf, by the etarnal! Hullo, Stebbins!' continued he facing sharply around to the saint; 'what's the meanin' o' this! Didn't you tell me that he war dead?'

Stebbins had turned pale as a sheet; and I could see his thin lips quivering with excitement. It was less fear than some other passion that was playing upon his features; and too easily could

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I conjecture the current of thought that was rushing through his mind. The presence of that animal must have called up a train of reflections, far wilder and stranger than those that occupied the mind of the squatter; and I could perceive that he was making an effort to conceal his emotions.

'Tis a very odd circumstance,' said he, speaking in a tone of assumed surprise—'very odd indeed! It is the dog, certainly, though he has been disfigured. I *thought* he was dead. The men of our spring caravan told me so. They said that the wolves had killed him.'

'Wolves! durn it, I mout a know'd they kudn't a killed him—not all the wolves on the parairas! Why thar ain't the scratch o' a claw on him! Whar did he come from anyhow? Who's brought him here?'

I could see that Stebbins was desirous of parrying this question. He gave an evasive answer.

'Who knows? He has likely been in the hands of some Indians—the paint shows that—and preferring the company of whites, he has followed us, and strayed into the camp.'

'Did he come with them ere Injuns that's outside?' quickly inquired Holt.

'No—I fancy not with them,' answered the Mormon, in whose glance I could detect the guilty lie.

'Let's go an' see!' proposed the squatter, making a step towards the entrance of the corral.

'No—not to-night, Holt!' hastily interposed the other, and with an eagerness that showed the interest he felt in procrastinating the inquiry. 'We must not disturb them to-night. In the morning, we can see them, and learn all about it.'

'Durn about disturbin' them! Why not to-night, as well as the mornin'?'

'Well—if you wish to know to-night, I'll go myself, and see the guide. No doubt, if the dog came with them, he can tell us all about it? You stay here till I return?'

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'Don't be long then. Ho, Wolf! old fellur! Injuns have had ye, eh? Durn it old boy! I'm as gled to see ye, as if'——

An unexpected reflection was called forth by the form of speech—not that to which he was about to give words—but one whose bitterness, not only hindered him from saying what he had intended, but caused him instantly to abandon his caresses of the dog.

Staggering back to his seat, he dropped heavily down upon it, at the same time burying his face in his hands.

The expression upon the Mormon's features, as he parted from the fire, was one of demoniac significance. Clearly he comprehended all!

I saw him gliding off through the corral, with silent stealthy tread, like some restless spirit of darkness. Here and there he paused; and for a moment held one in conversation—then quickly passing on to another. There was no mistaking the object of these manœuvres. As clearly as if declared, I divined their intent. *He was summoning the 'Destroyers!'*

Not a moment was to be lost. I rushed back to the rear of the wagon; and with open arms gave utterance to my anguished appeal. But it needed not that. Marian had been before me. Both she and her sister had witnessed the scene within the corral. Both already foresaw the coming storm; and ere my lips could close, after delivering the impassioned speech, Lilian Holt lay upon my bosom!

It was the first time that fair cheek had pressed upon my shoulder—the first time those soft arms had entwined around my neck? But not for an instant dared I indulge in the sweet embrace. If we lingered, it might be the last!

To the tents! to the tents!

I knew that the horses would be waiting. A signal already given should have warned my comrades; and I had no conjecture—no fear.

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As I expected, we found them all—both men and horses—the steeds saddled, bridled, and ready.

The Mexican was there with the rest. The apparition of the dog had given him his cue; and he had hurriedly returned to the tents.

We thought not of these nor of the other paraphernalia—neither our mules nor their packs. Our lives and liberty alone concerned us.

My Arab neighed joyously, as I sprang into the saddle. He was proud to carry that fairer form upon the croup; and as he bounded forward over the plain, his triumphant snort told, that he understood the glorious service he was called upon to perform.

As we parted from the tents, we could see a number of dark forms rushing out from the avenue. In the red glare their shadows were projected far over the plain—even in advance of our horses.

They were the shadows of men afoot; and we soon gallopped beyond them.

The music had suddenly ceased; and the murmuring hum of the dancing crowd had given place to shouts and loud cries that betokened a *stampede* in the camp. We could distinguish the voices of men calling to the horse-guards; and the quick trampling of hoofs, as the animals were hurried up to the enclosure.

But we had no uneasiness about the pursuit. We were too well mounted to fear being overtaken; and, as we gallopped off into the night, with confidence could we echo the cry of the bold borderer:

They'll have fleet steeds that follow!

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CHAPTER XCIX

SEEKING A CACHE.

We rode direct for Robideau's Pass. The night still continued dark, but we had no difficulty in finding our way. Even in the obscurity, the deep trace of the heavy emigrant train was sufficiently conspicuous; and we were enabled to follow the back-track with precision. Our experienced guide could have conducted us over it blindfold.

That we were pursued, and hotly pursued, there could be little doubt. For my part I felt certain of it. The stake which Stebbins had hitherto held was too precious to be parted with on slight conditions. The jealous vigilance with which Lilian had been guarded along the route—amounting, as I now incidentally ascertained, to a positive espionage—the yellow duenna at once acting as spy and protectress—all were significant of the intent already suspected by us, but of which the young girl herself was perhaps happily ignorant.

The failure of his design—and now for the second time—would be a rude *contre-temps* to the pseudo-apostle; and would no doubt endanger his expected promotion. Besides, he must have believed, or suspected, that Marian Holt still lived—that she had survived the exposure consequent on her escape from the first caravan; and this belief or suspicion would now be confirmed by the reappearance of the dog. Nay, it was almost certain that on recognising the animal, the truth had suddenly flashed upon him: that Marian was herself upon the ground, and that the spotted face that had for the moment deceived him, was the

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countenance of his Tennessean bride. The abduction following upon the instant would not only confirm this belief, but would redouble his eagerness in a pursuit that promised the recapture of both victims, who had thus unexpectedly escaped from his control.

Though with different motives, it was natural that Holt himself should be equally eager to pursue. He might still suspect nothing of Marian or her disguise. To him it would simply appear that his other child had been stolen from the camp—carried off by Indians—and that *should* be sufficient to rouse him to the most strenuous efforts for her recovery.

For these reasons, we had no doubt about our being pursued; and with all the zeal and energy of which our apostolic enemy and his myrmidons were capable of putting forth.

Twenty miles separated the Mormon camp from the entrance to Robideau's Pass. Nearly the whole of that distance we had traversed at a gallop. So far we had experienced no uneasiness; but, after entering the pass, our foaming horses began to show fatigue. Those of Sure-shot and Wingrove, that were weaker than the rest, manifested signs of giving out. Both were evidently broken, and without rest could go no further.

This produced renewed apprehension. We knew that the horses of our pursuers would be comparatively fresh—after their long rest at their encampment—while ours had not only made a considerable journey the day before, but on that same day had passed over fifty miles of ground—twenty of it in a gallop! No wonder they were manifesting signs of distress.

Shortly after entering the pass, we drew up to deliberate. By continuing onward we should be almost certain to be overtaken This was the more probable from the keen pursuit we had reasons to anticipate. To remain where we were, would be to await the coming up of the enemy—no doubt in such numbers as to render our capture secure; and any attempt to defend ourselves would be as idle as fatal. It was no longer with Indians we should have

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to deal—no longer with lances and arrows—but with strong bold men, armed like ourselves, and far outnumbering us.

To conceal ourselves within the gorge, and permit our pursuers to pass, might have served our purpose for the time, had there been sufficient cover; but neither the rocks nor trees offered an advantageous hiding-place for our horses. The risk of their being discovered appeared too great. We dared not trust to such slight chance of security.

Within the pass it was not possible to part from the trail; and on discovering the condition of our horses, we regretted not having left it before entering. We even entertained the question of returning some distance; and leaving the trail by ascending a spur of the mountains in our rear: but this appeared too perilous. Perhaps at that moment our pursuers might have entered the pass? Perhaps at that moment 'adown the glen rode armed men'—though as yet our ears were not assailed by the sound of their trampling.

Fortunately, in this moment of hesitancy, a thought occurred to our Mexican comrade, that promised to release us from the dilemma. It was a *memory* that had suddenly arisen to him. He remembered, on one of his trapping expeditions, having discovered a ravine that led out of Robideau's Pass on the northern side. It was a mere cleft in the cliff, just wide enough to admit the body of a man on horseback. Further up, it opened into a little plain—or *vallon*, as the Mexican termed it—completely girt in by mountains. These on all sides rose so precipitously from the plain, as to render it impossible for a mounted man to scale them. The trapper had himself been obliged to return by the gorge—after having vainly endeavoured to find a way leading outward above. The vallon was therefore a *cul-de-sac*, or, as the trapper in his native synonym called it, a *bolson*.

Our guide was of opinion that this *bolson* would serve as a hiding-place, until we could rest our horses; and he was confident that the entrance of the ravine was not far from where we

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had halted, and, moreover, that he should be able to find it without difficulty. His advice, therefore, was, that we should seek the gorge, and having found it, ride up into the vallon, and there remain till the following night. The pursuit might pass in the meantime, and return again; but whether or not, our animals would then be rested; and even should we again encounter the pursuers, we might hope to escape, through the superior speed of our horses.

The plan was feasible. There was but one objection that struck me; and I offered it for the consideration of our guide. The *vallon*, as he had stated, was a *cul-de-sac*. Should we be *tracked into it*, there would be no chance of retreat: we should be taken as in a trap?

'*Carrambo!*' exclaimed the Mexican in answer to my suggestion, 'no fear of being tracked by such curs as they. They know nothing of that business—not one of their whole fraternity, could follow the trace of a buffalo in snow-time. *Carrambo!* no.'

'There is one who could,' I replied; 'one who could follow a tinier trail than that.'

'What! A *rastreador* among these *Judios!* Who, *cavallero?*'

'*Their* father.'

I whispered the reply, so that neither of the girls should overhear it.

'Oh! true,' muttered the Mexican—'the father of the huntress—a hunter himself? *Carai!* that's like enough. But no matter. I can take you up the gorge in such fashion that the most skilled *rastreador* of the prairies would never suspect we had passed through. Fortunately, the ground is favourable. The bottom of the little cañon is covered with cut rock. The hoof will leave no mark upon these.'

'Remember that some of our horses are shod: the iron will betray us?'

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'No, señor, we shall muffle them; *nos vamos con los pies en medias!* (Let us travel in stockings).'

The idea was not new to me: and without further hesitation, we proceeded to carry it into execution. With pieces of blanket, and strips cut from our buckskin garments, we muffled the hoofs of our shod horses; and, after following the wagon-trail, till we found a proper place for parting from it, we diverged in an oblique direction, towards the bluff that formed the northern boundary of the pass. Along this we followed the guide in silence; and after going for a quarter of a mile further, we had the satisfaction to see him turn to the left, and suddenly disappear from our sight, as if he had ridden into the face of the solid rock!

We might have felt astonishment: but a dark chasm at the same instant came under our eyes; and we knew it was the ravine of which our guide had been in search.

Without exchanging a word, we turned our horses' heads, and rode up the cleft. There was water running among the shingle over which our steeds trampled; but it was shallow, and did not hinder their advance. It would further aid in concealing their tracks—should our pursuers succeed in tracing us from the main route. But we had little apprehension of their doing this: so carefully had we blinded our trail, on separating from that of the wagons.

On reaching the little vallon, we no longer thought of danger; but, riding on to its upper end, we dismounted, and made the best arrangements the circumstances would admit of for obtaining that repose, of which most of us stood sufficiently in need.

Wrapped in buffalo robes, and a little apart from the rest of our party, the sisters reclined side by side, under the shade of a cotton-wood tree.

Long while had it been since these beautiful forms had reposed so near each other; and the soft low murmur of their

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voices, heard above the sighing of the breeze and the ripplingsound of the mountain rills, admonished us that each was confiding to the other the sweet secret of her bosom.

CHAPTER C.

UN PARAISO.

We come to the closing act of our drama. To understand it fully, it is necessary that the setting of the stage—the *mise en scène*—be described with a certain degree of minuteness.

The little valley-plain or *vallon* in which we had *cachéd* ourselves was not over three hundred yards in length, and of an elliptical form. But for this form, it might have resembled some ancient crater scooped out of the mountain that on all sides swept upward around it. The sides of this mountain, trending up from the level of the plain, rose not with a gentle acclivity, but with precipitous abruptness. At no point, however, did it assume the steepness of a cliff. It might have been scaled with difficulty by a man on foot—especially should he avail himself of the assistance of the trees—pines and trailing junipers—that grew over the face of the slope so thickly as to conceal the greater portion of the rocky *façade*. Here and there only a bare spot might be observed—a little buttress of white laminated gypsum, mingled with sparkling selenite; while at other places a miniature torrent, foaming over the rocks, and dancing among the dark cedars, presented a very similar appearance.

These little torrents, plashing down to the plain, formed numerous crystal rills that traversed the vallon. Like the branches of a silver candelabrum, all united near its centre; and there formed a pellucid stream, that, sweeping onward, discharged itself through the ravine into Robideau's Pass.

The effect of this abundance of water had been to produce

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within the *vallen* a proportionate luxuriance of vegetation—though it had not assumed the form of a forest. A few handsome cotton-woods standing thinly over it were the only trees; but the surface exhibited a verdure of emerald brightness, enamelled by many a gay corolla, born to blush unseen within this sweet secluded glen. Along the edge of the rivulet, large water-plants projected their broad leaves languidly over the stream; and where the little cascades came down over the rocks, the flowers of beautiful orchids, and other rare epiphytes, were seen sparkling under the spray—many of them clinging to the *coniferæ*, and thus uniting almost the extreme forms of the botanical world!

Such lovely landscape was presented to our eyes in the 'bolson' into which our trapper guide had conducted us. It appeared lovely as we first beheld it under the blue light of dawn; but lovelier far when the sun began to tinge the summits of the Mojada mountains that encircled it, and scatter his empurpled rays on the snowy peaks of the Wa-to-yah, just visible through the gorge.

'*Esta un Paraiso!*' (It is a Paradise!) exclaimed the Mexican, warming with the poetry of his race. '*En verdad un Paraiso.* Even better peopled than the Paradise of old. *Mira! cavallero,*' continued he. 'Behold! not one Eve, but two! each, I dare say, as beautiful as the mother of mankind!'

As the trapper spoke, he pointed to the two young girls, who, hand in hand, were returning from the stream—where they had been performing their ablutions. The spots of *allegria* had disappeared from the cheeks of Marian, that now gleamed in all their crimson picturesqueness. It was for Wingrove to admire these. My own eyes were rivetted upon the roseate blonde; and, gazing upon her face, I could not help echoing the sentiment of the enthusiastic speaker: 'Beautiful as the mother of mankind!'

Wingrove and I had been to the *lavatory* before them; and had succeeded to a certain extent in scouring our skins clear of

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the vermilion bedaubment. In the anticipation of this pleasant interview, it was natural we should seek to rescue ourselves from a disguise, that the eye of woman could not look upon otherwise than with *dégoût*.

It was natural, too, we should desire those clasped hands to come asunder—those maiden forms to separate from one another.

Fortune was pleased to respond to our desires. A flower hanging from the branch of a tree at that moment caught the eye of Lilian; and, dropping her sister's hand, she hastened to gather it. Marian, who cared less for flowers, did not follow her. Perhaps her inclination tempted her the other way?

But one did follow the fair Lilian—unable to resist the opportunity for free converse—the only one that had offered since that hour of sweet first impression.

How my heart bounded, when I beheld the blossom of the bignonia—for it was that which hung drooping from the branch of the cotton-wood, round which its bright leaves were amorously entwining! How it swelled with a triumphant joy, when I saw those tiny fingers extend towards the flower, gently pluck it from its stem, and place it upon my bosom?

Talk not of bliss, if it be not this!

We strayed on through the straggling trees, along the banks of the stream, by the edges of the little rills. We wandered around the vallon, and stood by the torrents that fell foaming from the rocks. We mingled our voices with the waters, that in low murmurings appeared to repeat the sentiment so endeared to us, 'I think of thee!'

'And you will, Lilian—you will think of me?

'Yes, Edward!—for ever and ever!'

Was the kiss unhallowed that could seal such promise? No—it was sacred,

> Down to Earth's profound,
> And up to Heaven!

Thus benighted with the sweet hallucination of love, how

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could we dream that on earth there existed an alloy? How suspect that into that smiling garden the dread serpent could intrude himself? Alas, he was at that moment approaching it—he was already near!

* * * * * *

The place we had chosen for our temporary bivouac—and where we had passed the night—was at the upper extremity of the little valley, and close in the cliff. We had selected this spot, from the ground being a little more elevated than the general surface, and in consequence drier. Several cotton-wood trees shaded it; and it was further sheltered by a number of large boulders of rock, that having fallen from the cliff above, lay near its base. Behind these boulders, the men of our party had slept; not from any idea of the greater security afforded by them, but simply from a delicate motive—being thus separated from the *chamber* occupied by our fair *protégés*.

It had never occurred to us that our place of concealment could be discovered in the night; and even long after the day had arisen, so confident did we continue in our fancied security, that we had taken no precautions, either to reconnoitre the cliffs in search of a way of retreat, or to adopt any means of defence in the event of our being assailed.

As far as Wingrove and I were concerned, I have explained this negligence—for it was negligence of the most imprudent character. The Mexican, feeling quite certain that he had succeeded in blinding our trail, was perhaps less cautious than he might otherwise have been; and Sure-shot equally trusted to his new comrade—for whose skill the ex-ranger had conceived an exalted opinion.

I could see withal that Archilete was not without some apprehension. He had buckled on his artificial leg—the real one being fatigued by pressing too long on the stirrup—and, as he hobbled about over the ground I noticed that from time to time he cast inquiring looks down the valley.

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Observing these signs of impatience more than once, I began to grow uneasy.

Prudence required that even that sweet scene should be interrupted—only temporarily, I hoped—until some plan should be adopted that would render us more secure against the contingency of our being discovered.

With my fair companion, I had turned away from the sweet whisperings of the cascade, and was facing to the upper end of the vallon, when all at once I observed a strange manœuvre on the part of 'Peg Leg.' The trapper had thrown himself flat upon the grass; and with his ear placed close to the ground, appeared to listen!

The movement was too significant not to attract the attention of everybody. My companion was the only one who did not comprehend it; but she observed that it had powerfully affected all the others, and an ejaculation of alarm escaped her, as she saw them hastening up to the spot occupied by the prostrate trapper.

Before we could reach him, the man had sprung back into an erect attitude; and as he stamped his timber leg with violence upon the ground, was heard to exclaim:

'*Carrambo, camarados!* the curs are upon our trail! *Oiga os?—el perro—el perro!*' (You hear them—the dog—the dog!)

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when their interpretation followed in the sound that came pealing up the valley. Borne upon the sighing breeze, it was heard above the rushing noise of the waters—easily heard, and as easily understood. It was the bay of a dog, who ran 'gowling' along a trail.

Its deep tone was even identified. The huntress recognised it in the first note that fell upon her ear, as was evidenced by her quick exclamation:

'Wolf!—my dog Wolf!'

The speech had scarcely escaped her, before the dog himself made his appearance, convincing us all of his shorn identity

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The animal seeing us, ran no longer by the scent; but with raised snout came galloping across the valley, and bounded forward to receive the caresses of his mistress.

We rushed to our weapons; and having secured them, ran behind the boulders of rock. It would have been idle to take to our horses. If our pursuers were following the dog, and guided by him, they would already be near enough to intercept our retreat from the valley? Perhaps they were at that moment in the gorge?

We had but one hope; and that was, that the dog might be *alone*. Missing Marian at the camp, he might have struck upon her trail, and been following it throughout the night?

It seemed scarcely probable; for Holt could have detained him, and in all likelihood would have done so? Still less probable did it appear, as we watched the movements of the dog himself. Instead of staying by Marian, and continuing to receive her caresses, we noticed that at short intervals he ran off again, making demonstrations in the direction he had come—as if in expectation of some one who had been following at his heels!

The slight hope we had conceived was quickly and rudely crushed, by the confirmation of this fact. The voices of men echoing hoarsely through the gorge, confirmed it.

Beyond doubt, they were our pursuers, guided by the dog—who little understood the ruin he was thus conducting towards the object of his instinctive affections!

CHAPTER CI.

AN UNEXPECTED DEFECTION.

Almost as soon as we heard the voices, we saw those were giving utterance to them. A horseman appeared in

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from the jaws of the chasm—another and another—until eight had filed into the open ground! They were all armed men—armed with guns, pistols, and knives.

He in the lead was at once identified. The colossal stature, the blanket coat, red shirt and kerchief turban, proclaimed that the foremost of our pursuers was Holt himself.

Immediately behind him rode Stebbins; while those following in file were the executive myrmidons of the Mormon faith—the *Destroying Angels!*

On entering the open ground, Holt alone kept on without slackening his speed. Stebbins followed, but more cautiously, and at a distance of several lengths of his horse. The Danites, at sight of our animals, and ourselves too—for they could not fail to see our faces over the rocks—drew up: not suddenly, but one after the other—as if irresolute whether to advance or remain where they were. Even Stebbins, though moving on after the squatter, did so with evident reluctance. He saw the barrels of our rifles gleaming above the boulders; and, when within about fifty paces distant from us, he too reined in—keeping the body of Holt between himself and our guns.

The squatter continued to advance, without the slightest show of fear. So near had he got to us, that we could note the expression upon his features, though it was difficult to understand it. It was one that bespoke reckless determination—no doubt a determination to recover his child from the savages who had stolen her: for as yet he had no reason to think otherwise.

Of course none of us thought of firing upon Holt; but had Stebbins at the moment advanced only a step nearer, there was more than one rifle ready to give out its deadly detonation.

Holt approached rapidly, his horse going at a trot. He held his long gun obliquely in front of him, and grasped in both hands as if ready to fire on the instant.

All at once, he checked his horse, dropped the gun on the pommel of his saddle, and sat gazing towards us with a look of bewildered surprise. *White* faces appearing over the rocks

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stead of *red* ones, had caused this sudden change in his demeanour.

Before he had time to give utterance to his astonishment, Lilian glided from behind the rock, and standing with arms extended, cried out:

'O father! they are not Indians! It is Marian! it is'——

At the same instant her sister appeared by her side.

'Marian alive!' cried Holt, recognising his long-lost daughter. 'My child Marian yet livin'! God be praised! Thar's one weight off o' my poor soul—an' now to eeze it o' another!'

As he uttered the last words, he wrenched his horse half around, dropped to his feet upon the nearer side; and quickly resting his rifle over the hollow of his saddle, brought its barrel to bear on the breast of Stebbins—who still sat on horseback, scarce twenty paces distant from the spot.

'Now, Josh Stebbins!' cried the squatter in a voice of thunder, 'the time's come to squar the yurds wi *you*!'

'What do you mean, Holt?' mechanically inquired the Mormon in trembling surprise. 'What do you mean by that?'

'I mean, you infernal skunk, that afore ye leave this groun', you've got to make a clean breast o' it, an' clar me o' the crime o' murder.'

'What murder?' inquired Stebbins prevaricatingly.

'Oh! you know what I'm talkin' about! 'Twant no murder. 'Twar only a suicide; an' God knows it broke my own heart.'

Holt's voice was husky with emotion. He continued after a pause:

'For all o' that appearances war agin' me; an you invented proofs that wud a stood good among lawyers, though thar as false as yur own black heart. Ye've kep' 'em over me for years to sarve yer rascally dersigns. But thar's neither law nor lawyers hyur to help you any longer. Thar's witnesses o' both sides—yar own beauties down yander; an some hyur o' a better sort, I reck'n. Afore them, I call on ye to declar that yar proofs war false, an' that I'm innocent o' the crime o' murder!'

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There was a profound silence as the speaker finished. The strange and unexpected nature of the demand held every one in breathless surprise. Even the armed men at the bottom of the *vallon* said not a word; and perceiving by the defection of Holt, there was almost gun for gun against them, they showed no signs of advancing to the protection of their apostolic leader.

The latter appeared for a moment to vacillate. The fear depicted upon his features was blended with an expression of the most vindictive bitterness—as that of a tyrant forced to yield up some despotic privilege which he had long wielded. True, it mattered little to him now. The intended victims of his vile contrivance—whatever it may have been—were likely to escape from his control in another way; but for all that he seemed loath to part with even the shadow of his former influence.

He was not allowed much time for reflection—scarce the opportunity to look towards his Danites, which however he did—glancing back as if desirous of retreating to them.

'Stan' yar groun'!' shouted the squatter in a tone of menace—'stan'yur groun'! Don't dar to turn away. Ef yo do, ye'll only get the bullet in yur back. Now, confess! or, by the eternal ——! you hain't another second to sit in that saddle!'

The quick threatening manner in which the speaker grasped his gun, told Stebbins that prevarication would be idle. In hurried speech, he replied:

'You committed no murder, Hickman Holt. I never said you did!'

'No! but you said you would, an' you invented proofs o' it? Confess you invented proofs, an' kep 'em over my head like a shadder? Confess that!'

Stebbins hesitated.

Quick! or ye're a dead man!'

'I did,' muttered the guilty wretch, trembling as he spoke.

'An' the proofs war false?'

'They were false—I confess it.'

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'Enuf!' cried Holt, taking down his gun. 'Enuf for me An' now, ye cowardly snake, ye may go wi' yur beauties yonder They'll not like ye a bit the wuss for all that. Ye may go—an' carry yur conscience along wi' ye—if that'll be any comfort to ye. Begone!'

'No!' exclaimed a voice from behind, and at the same time Wingrove was seen stepping out from the rock. 'Not yet adzactly. *I've* got a score to settle wi' the skunk. The man who'd plot that way again another, hain't ought to live. *you* may let him off, Hick Holt, but *I* won't; nor wud you eyther, I reck'n if you knew'——

'Knew what?' interrupted the squatter.

'What he intended for your daughter.'

'He is my daughter's husband,' rejoined Holt in a tone of contrition.

'He ain't nothing of the kind. The marriage war a sham He war takin' poor Marian out thar for a diff'rent purpose—an' Lilian too.'

'For what purpose?' cried Holt, a light seeming suddenly to break upon his mind.

'To make ——,' answered Wingrove, hesitatingly, 'I can't say the word, Hick Holt, in presence o' the girls—to make *wives* to the Mormon prophet—that 's what he intended wi' both o' em.'

The cry, that, like the neigh of an angry horse, burst from the lips of the squatter, drowned the last words of Wingrove's speech; and simultaneously the crack of a rifle rose upon the air. A cloud of smoke for a moment enveloped Holt and his horse, from the midst of which came a repetition of that wild, vengeful cry.

At the same instant, the steed of Stebbins galloped riderless down the valley, while the saint himself was seen, stretched face upward upon the sward.

He lay still and lifeless—a purple spot on his forehead showing where the fatal bullet had entered his brain!

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The sisters had just time to shelter themselves behind the rock, when a volley from the Danites was poured upon us Their shots fell harmlessly around, while ours, fired in return, had been better aimed, and another of these fearful men, dropping out of his saddle, yielded up his life upon the spot. The remaining five, seeing that the day had gone against them, wheeled suddenly round; and galloped back down the gorge, ten times faster than they had ridden up. It was the last we saw of the *destroying angels.*

* * * * * *

'Oh, my children!' cried Holt in a supplicating tone, as he staggered forward, and received both within his outstretched embrace, 'will ye—can ye forgi' me? Oh, God! I've been a bad father to ye; but I knew not the wickedness o' these people; nor half o' *his*, till it war too late; an' now'——

'And now, father!' said Marian, interrupting his contrite speech with a consoling smile, 'speak not of forgiveness. There is nothing to forgive, and perhaps not much to regret: since the perils we have gone through have proved our faith to one another. We shall go home all the happier, having escaped so many dangers.'

'Ah, Marian, gurl, you don't know all—we hev now no home to go to!'

'The same you ever had, if you will consent to accept it. The old cabin on Mud Creek will hold us all till we can build a bigger one. But no'—I added correcting myself—'I see two here who will scarcely feel inclined to share its hospitality. Another cabin higher up the creek, will be likely to claim them for its tenants.'

Marian blushed; while the young backwoodsman, although turning equally red at the allusion, had the courage to stammer out, that he always 'thort his cabin war big enough for two.'

'Stranger!' said Holt, turning to me, and frankly extending his hand, 'I've much to be ashamed o', an' much to thank ye for, but I accept yur kind offer You bought the land, an' I'd return

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ye the money, ef 't hedn't been all spent. I thort I kud a m
up for it, by gieing ye somethin' ye mout a liked better. N
I see I can't even gi' ye that somethin', since it appears to
yourn a'ready. Ye've won her, stranger! an' ye've got l
All I kin now do is to say that from the bottom o' my hea
consent to yur keepin' her.'

'Thanks—thanks!'

Lilian was mine for ever.

* * * * * *

The curtain falls upon our drama; and brief must be the ep
logue.

To scenes warlike and savage succeeded those of a pacific an
civilised character; as the turbulent torrent, debouching fro
its mountain channel, flows in tranquil current through the all
vion of the level plain.

By our Utah allies, whom we encountered on the following day
we were 'outfitted' for recrossing the prairies—the abandone
wagon, with a team of Indian mules, affording a proper mean
of transport.

Not without regret did we part with the friendly Mexican
trapper, and our brave associates, the ex-rifleman and ex-infantry. We had afterwards the gratification to learn that the scalpless man survived his terrible mutilation; that under the protection of Peg-leg, he and Sure-shot were taken to the valley of Taos; whence along with the next migration of 'diggers' they proceeded by the Colorado, to the golden placers of California.

To detail the incidents of our homeward journey, were a pleasant task for the pen; but the record would scarcely interest the reader. The colossal squatter, silent but cheerful, drove the wagon, and busied himself about the management of his mules. The young backwoodsman and I were thus left free to interchange with our respective 'sweethearts' those phrases of delirious endearment, those glances of exquisite sweetness, that only pass between eyes illuminated by the light of a mutual love.

Proverbially sweet is the month after marriage; but the

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honeymoon with all its joys, could not have exceeded in bliss those ante-nuptial hours spent by us in recrossing the prairies. Clear as the sky over our heads was the horoscope of our hearts; and doubt and suspicion had passed away; not a shadow lingered upon the horizon of our future, to dim the perfect happiness we enjoyed. In our case, the delight of anticipation could not be enhanced by actual possession: since we had possession already.

We arrived safely in Swampville. In the post-office of that interesting village a letter awaited me, of which 'jet black was de seal.' Under ordinary circumstances, this should have cast a gloom upon my joy; but candor forces me to confess, that a perusal of the contents of that epistle produced upon me an effect altogether the reverse. The letter announced the demise of an octogenarian female relative, whom I had never seen; but who for a full decade of years beyond the period allotted to the life of man—or woman either—had obstinately persisted in standing betwixt me and a small reversion—so long indeed, that I had ceased to regard it as an 'expectation.'

It was of no great amount; but arriving just then in the very 'nick o' time,' was doubly welcome; and under its strengthening influence, a large quantity of superfluous timber soon disappeared from the banks of Mud Creek.

Ah! the squatter's clearing with its zigzag fence, its girdled trees, and white deadwoods! It is no longer recognisable. The log-hut is replaced by a pretentious frame dwelling, with portico and verandahs—almost a mansion. The little maize-patch, scarcely an acre in extent, is now a splendid plantation of many fields; in which wave the golden tassels of the Indian corn, the broad leaves of another indigenous vegetable—the aromatic 'Indian weed,' and the gossamer-like florets of the precious cotton-plant. Even the squatter himself you would scarcely recognise in the respectable old gentleman, who, mounted upon his cob, with a long rifle over his shoulder, rides around, looking after

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the affairs of the plantation, and picking off the squirrels, who threaten the young corn with their destructive depredations.

It is not the only plantation upon Mud Creek. A little further up the stream another is met with—almost equally extended, and cultivated in like manner. Need I say who is the owner of this last? Who should it be but the young backwoodsman, now transformed into a prosperous planter?

The two estates are contiguous, and no jealous fence separates the one from the other. Both extend to that flowery glade, of somewhat sad notoriety, whose bordering woods are still undefiled by the axe. Not there, but in another spot, alike flowery and pleasant, the eye of the soaring eagle, looking from aloft, may see united together a joyous group—the owners of the two plantations—with their young wives, Marian and Lilian. The sisters are still in the full bloom of their incomparable beauty. In neither is the maiden yet subdued into the matron; though each beholds her own type reflected in more than one bright face smiling by her side; while more than one little voice lisps sweetly in her ear that word of fond endearment—the first that falls from human lips.

Ah! beloved Lilian! thine is not a beauty born to blush but for an hour. In my eyes it can never fade; but, like the blossom of the citron, seems only the fairer, blooming by the side of its own fruit!

I leave it to other lips to symbol the praises of thy sister—

THE WILD HUNTRESS.

THE END.

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